University of Alberta

Understanding Difference Differently: Sex-and-Gender OUTlaws in Alberta Schools

by

Kristopher Wells ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

Adult and Higher Education

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We are the community of tomorrow. How we are treated now, our experiences now, who we are able to become, will affect the world of tomorrow. Even though we're young and gay, we're people just like you.

— Chris, age 17 (as cited in Ryan & Futterman 1998, p. xi)

I seek out ways in which the arts can release imagination to open new perspectives, to identify alternatives. The vistas that might open, the connections that might be made, are experiential phenomenon; our encounters with the world become newly informed. When they do they offer new lenses through which to look out at and interpret the educative acts that keep human beings and their culture alive.

— Maxine Greene (1995, p. 18)

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Understanding Difference Differently: Sex-and-Gender OUTlaws in Alberta Schools** submitted by Kristopher Wells in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Adult and Higher Education.

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Abstract

This study is based on research conducted with four Queer young adults (17-22 years old) in Alberta schools and communities. Drawing upon theoretical discourses from Queer theory, critical pedagogy, narrative inquiry, postmodern theory, and feminist poststructural theory, I use a multi-disciplinary approach to investigate how formal secondary and postsecondary educational environments in Alberta socially, culturally, politically, and pedagogically construct (and thus marginalize) Queer young adults as abnormal or deviant.

This research also examines how Queer young adults create spaces and languages of resistance as they work within non-formal learning communities to account for the educational absences and institutionalized silences that surround their sex-and-gender differences. I employ a multi-method research design that utilizes open-ended interviews, narrative-vignette construction, and visual narrative (photographic) techniques. This research will provide educators with knowledge of sex-and-gender differences to assist in policy and program development designed to create safe, caring, and inclusive schools and communities.

Preface: A note to the reader

I encourage you to approach this text as a work-in-progress. I could not possibly write a *complete* text, as our language, ideas, and emotions are always in the process of constant motion, negotiation, and construction. Each time the words of this research text are read they are in the process of being rewritten by you the reader.

The photographs in this text are not intended to serve as a documentary tool, but, instead, as a catalyst for reflection and interpretation. All the photographs have been taken by the research participants and are interspersed throughout the text to serve as fragmented figurations that are intended to provoke curiosity, arouse questions, and challenge interpretations.

I invite you to read and view this text as an opportunity to converse with the research participants and me as we explore what it means to engage in research and live, learn, and work as Queer persons within the landscapes of Alberta schools and communities.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kevin, Jordana, Alex, and Jamie for taking time away from their school, community, and family commitments to share their personal stories, thoughts, feelings, and reflections with me. I dedicate this work to them and to the many other Queer young adults in Canada who are blazing new trails of hope and possibility for Queer youth to be, become, and belong as full and valued members of our society.

I would like to acknowledge the scholarly community of the Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta for their unwavering support in my academic research and community activism. As well I am deeply thankful for the guidance, insight, encouragement, and mentorship provided by my committee members. Jean, you and our Center friends have provided me with a wonderful and nurturing *second home* here at the university. Tara, your critical insights, professionalism, and sheer enthusiasm have had a profound impact on the ways in which I think about research and teaching. André, my friend and mentor, without your unconditional support I would not be here today. Your dedication, passion, and work ethic have challenged me to soar to new heights. You have dared me to dream and fight for a future in which there is hope for us to imagine our schools and communities as truly inclusive spaces for *all* students and *all* teachers.

To my family – Jake, Marilyn, Rob, and Tasha – each of you have made tremendous sacrifices that have allowed me to pursue my dreams. I'm truly blessed to have you all in my life. You are my angels.

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Intertext I – Everyday Angels

Will *there be angels*
when I open the door
walk through
to the other side?
Will *they take my hand?*
walk beside me
in the light?
Will *I close my eyes*
and dream of angels?
Will *they take me*
in their arms?
Will *there be angels?*

- Jim Chalgren (1994) as cited in Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. 59.

According to the Canadian Oxford Paperback Dictionary (2000) an angel is defined as "**1 a** an attendant or messenger of God. **b** a conventional representation of this in human form with wings. **c** an attendant spirit (guardian angel). **d** *Christianity* a member of the lowest of nine orders of angelic beings. **2 a** a very virtuous person. **b** an obliging person" (p. 29).

On a cold gray Sunday afternoon, during a day that is typical for February in Alberta, I met Chase in the parking lot of a Toys 'R' Us store in Edmonton. I'm struck by his burning blue eyes. I see an icy fire and desire buried deep within his gaze. I'm the first gay person that Chase has ever talked to. He tells me that he's sixteen. He waits silently for my reaction, half expecting that I'll throw him out of the car and into the cold.

He's nervous, so I lead the conversation. I ask him about his family and school life. He doesn't say much. He just smiles in between a few short replies. I ask him if he is religious, he says "No, not at all". Silently I say to myself, "Thank God". I'm hoping that things will be less complicated for him without a religious background.

Our conversation becomes more comfortable as he begins to see that I'm "normal". We talk about our goals, dreams, and hopes for the future. He asks me what it's like to be gay. When did I know? How did my parents react? More and more questions begin to come. I am patient, and I answer them all. It wasn't too long ago that I had many of the same questions, wishing that I too had someone to ask them to.

I tell Chase about my life. I describe the obstacles and the challenges, but ultimately I focus on the rewards and the sense of peace that I found when I chose to finally be honest with myself and come out. I don't lie to Chase, I tell him that it's a difficult road and that no two people follow exactly the same path. I ask Chase to listen to me very carefully as I say, "If you remember one thing from our conversation, make sure that it's this message – You're normal and beautiful just the way you are. You're not sick, perverted, or evil, and don't let anyone else ***ever*** tell

you differently." He looks at me and flashes a big smile. All I see are those burning blue eyes… I've never seen Chase again.

Six months later I receive an email from Chase that reads:

> Saturday, August 7, 1999 12:43 AM
>
> I've decided to kill a part of myself I never knew and not to cry but be happy for those who live with theirs [sic] such as yourself.
>
> I lied to you when I said I didn't believe in God, but Kris, no matter what or whom the people we are, he made us. And I believe that he loves everyone - gay or not. It's just sometimes people get caught up in the afflictions that come along with belief and are so scared of what is different they make their words God. Those people are obviously shallow enough to believe that their ideals and conceptions are that of God. As I continue to ramble, I'm pretty sure that I have no right to speak of this or tell you its okay when I'm trying to convince myself.
>
> I don't know what's left to be said except sometimes there's this feeling in your heart you get when you meet a person who seems to have the world at their doorstep, that's you Kris. You don't realize how much you have touched me.
>
> All I can say is thank you, you're the first angel that I've ever met (personal communication, August 7, 1999).

I cry as I read Chase's email. Angel? I'm not an angel. Why do Queer young adults need angels to watch over and protect them? How do Chase and other Queer young adults attempt to survive in schools and communities where violence and identity erasure towards Queer persons is systemically institutionalized?

Many Queer young adults do not survive these hostile environments. Some look for angels to guide and protect them in environments that would rather see them dead than visible. Where are the everyday angels that are needed to create spaces in which Queer young adults can live, learn, and work in the everyday without the constant fear and threat of violence, harassment, and emotional abuse? Why are some students and teachers allowed to have everyday lives and experiences, yet

Queer students and Queer teachers are considered a *special* occurrence or disruption to the everyday operations (read heteronormative discourse) of the classroom and school experience (Britzman, 1998, p. 69)? When will educators say enough and begin to create safe, caring, and inclusive spaces where *all* youth can be, become, and belong as full and valued members of their schools and communities?

> I dream of the *everyday* …
>
> A day when a teenager can take his or her same-sex partner to the prom.
>
> A day when the words fag and dyke are no longer heard in the halls and classrooms of our schools.
>
> A day when Queer young adults no longer have to hide in the shadows of shame and fear.
>
> A day when Queer teachers can be proudly and safely out in their schools and communities.
>
> A day when gay/straight alliances are developed and supported in every high school.
>
> A day when we will no longer need angels to watch over and protect our Queer youth.

Until that day comes I ask:

> Where are these *everyday angels*? Where is the hope?

Chapter One

Introduction to Thesis Topic

"The research process is so complex that much of what happens is unintelligible either because the existing categories no longer work or because we simply have no category – no language – with which to describe what is happening theoretically or in the 'field'" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 10).

"Inquiry is a kind of self-wounding laboratory for discovering the rules by which truth is produced"
(Lather, 2000, p. 305).

Introduction and Purpose

Historically, Queer (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) young adults have been marginalized in adult, community, and school educational environments (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Friend, 1993 & 1998; Grace & Wells, 2001; Hill, 1995; Rhoads, 1994; Tierney, 1997; Quinlivan & Town, 1999). This research study investigates the lived and learned experiences of Queer young adults (ages 17 to 22) in formal (high school and postsecondary) educational contexts and in non-formal (youth group, church, and family) learning communities.

The purpose of this research investigation is to explore how many formal educational environments socially, culturally, politically, and pedagogically construct and marginalize Queer young adults as abnormal and deviant. This research study also explores how Queer young adults work within non-formal learning communities to create spaces in which they attempt to resist, deconstruct, and transform these heteronormative social, political, and pedagogical identity constructions.

This research study draws upon a poststructural, polyphonic, and multifaceted research strategy that utilizes unstructured interviews, narrative vignettes, and visual narrative (photographic) techniques to investigate the social, cultural, and personal lives of four Queer young adult research participants (Bach, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 1998; Lather, 1996; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Richardson, 1998; Weiser, 1993).

At the broadest level, my theoretical understandings presented in this research text are shaped, shifted, and molded through a qualitative research lens that is guided by poststructural, postmodern, and critical perspectives that are nested within feminist principles of voice, representation, and agency as well as Queer understandings of marginalization, invisibility, and silence. This theoretical nest is shaped and weaved together using pieces, perspectives, and essences of multiple theoretical approaches, methods, and interpretations that are rooted in my epistemological understandings of research as a wakeful, thoughtful, and self-reflective process that is messy, uncertain, and inherently problematic. This multi-theoretical perspective strives to move beyond the researcher-researched hyphen and into the community of activists and action (Fine, et. al., 2000) in which research "serves the community in which it is carried out, rather than [only a] community of knowledge producers and policy makers" (Denzin, 1997, p. 275).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe this type of nested approach as a bricolage, which is "a complex, dense, reflexive, collage like creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis" (p. 2-3). Kincheloe (2001) builds upon this

description and positions the bricolage as an active attempt by researchers to blur and disrupt disciplinary boundaries and genres in an "attempt to synthesize contemporary developments in social theory, epistemology, and interpretation" (p. 680).

By drawing together different domains of research, the researcher (or bricoleur) attempts to develop a "complex understanding of research and knowledge production [that] prepares bricoleurs to address the complexities of the social, cultural, psychological, and educational domains" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 687). In doing so the researcher works to create a multiperspective approach that will enable researchers to more effectively interpret, represent, deconstruct, and critique scholarship and pedagogy.

In this context I concur with the comments of Lather and Smithies (1997) who describe this form of bricolage as "a way of 'giving voice' to the stories of others… [with] researchers both getting out of the way and getting in the way" (p. xiv) of our common (mis)conceptions about research as an objective "all knowing" and "Truth" seeking process (p. xiv). The bricolage works on the "frontiers of knowledge" that rest in "the liminal zones where disciplines collide," encouraging researchers to engage in an often fragile boundary or border work (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 689).

One of the challenges that I posit in this research project is the need to shift our thinking and research from what we know to what we cannot bear to know about the lives and experiences of Queer young adults. This research is very much concerned with questioning and moving beyond limits – the limits of

intelligibility, representation, educational discourse, and identity construction(s). In attempt to challenge and move beyond these limits, I use poststructural textual (re)presentation as a deliberate strategy designed to be both an educational service and personal experience in which readers can come to bear witness to the stories and experiences of the researcher and research participants, not with sentimentality or pity, but with a deep personal conviction to sit with, rest, linger, and revisit the stories and images in this text as a means of countering the silences that exist in the lives and experiences of Queer young adults in Alberta schools and communities.

This is not a text that any of the research participants would most likely write for themselves, but it is my attempt to provide a critical, thoughtful, and distinctly Queer poststructural reflection on textual (re)presentation, method, and analysis through which the reader can struggle to make their own sense of the text and stories contained within. Accordingly, the layout and construction of this text is designed to provide layers of perspectives, information, and knowledge that strive to represent and map out the complexities of engaging in qualitative research within marginalized communities.

This thesis contains three intertexts (Lather & Smithies, 1997). These intertexts are designed to provide readers with my personal narratives and educational background information that strive to uncover and problematize what Rosaldo (1989,1993) describes as the reflective practice of the researcher as the researched. It is within these intertexts that I share my own personal, political, and

pedagogical investments, learnings, and understandings that I have deeply troubled over as I have engaged deeply since embarking on this research journey.

Research Problem & Questions

The research problem for this study is to examine the challenges, possibilities, risks, and resist-stances that Queer young adults consider when they determine how visible and vocal they can be in their educational environments, and how they attempt to resist and deconstruct the concomitant discourses of heteronormativity (Grace & Benson, 2000). This problem raises the following series of research questions:

- What is life like for Queer young adults who are in the process of coming out and coming to terms with their sex-and-gender differences in Alberta schools and communities?
- How does heterosexism and homophobia impact the personal, political, social, and cultural lives of Queer young adults in formal and non-formal educational environments?
- In what ways are Queer young adults simultaneously included and excluded in their educational, cultural, family, and community contexts?
- What impact does this inclusion/exclusion have on their mental, physical, and emotional well-being?
- How are adult, community, family, and public educational spaces sites of structural, symbolic, and actual violence towards Queer young adults?
- What do Queer young adults do to survive in their school, family, and cultural environments?

- What kinds of changes to policies, practices, and curriculum would Queer young adults suggest to create safe, caring, and supportive educational spaces and places for other Queer young adults?

Significance of the study

This research will contribute to a small but growing Queer literature in the field of public, adult, and higher education in Canada and the United States that addresses issues of inclusion, equity, and diversity for Queer students (Britzman, 1995; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Epstein and Sears, 1999; Grace, 2001a; Griffin, 1992; Hill, 1995; Jennings, 1994; Khayatt, 1999; Silin, 1995 & 1999; Rhoads, 1994; Tierney, 1997). The intention of this research project is to further develop the beginnings of a sustained dialogue that seeks to make a space (a recognized and useful presence) and place (a respected and valued position) for Queer young adults to question and challenge the dominant normalizing discourses of formal and non-formal learning communities (Grace & Benson, 2000). This research will help to educate and facilitate teachers, young adults, and community members to become critical, reflective, responsive, and responsible citizens who understand, value, and appreciate what it means to live, learn, and work within schools, communities, and families of difference.

This research investigation will also provide a unique Queer contribution to the expanding field of poststructural qualitative research design and methodology. By exploring and creating different forms of research and textual representation (through narrative vignettes, found poetry, and visual narratives), this research will seek to expand the space between what we know and can not

bear to know as researchers and teachers (Britzman, 1995; Richardson, 1998). These unknowable and unimaginable spaces are designed to encourage the reader to attend to their own "feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, [and] blurred experiences … [as they] struggle to find a textual place for [their] doubts and uncertainties" in this research (Richardson, 1998, p. 355).

Research Methodology

In selecting a methodology for this research investigation I have made a deliberate decision to avoid traditional anthropologic and ethnographic research methods that tend to position the researcher as one who can objectively analyze and make sense of a research participant's experiences (Denzin, 1997). In taking a poststructural approach I refuse to claim the ability to represent and speak for a research participant's individually situated experiences. It is not my intention to convey to the reader that I (or any researcher) can know or speak for our research participant's experiences. In developing a poststructural research methodology I have actively struggled to resist the construction of a universal Truth or meta-narrative. As a Queer researcher working with Queer research participants I have also sought to carefully avoid the impression that I can speak for all Queer persons. Instead, I have tried to let the research participants become the interpreters of their own stories by using unstructured interviews, found poetry, and visual narratives in this research investigation.

Research Design and Data Collection

A multi-method approach was used to collect the data needed to answer the research questions posed in this study. This approach is in keeping with

poststructural research methodologies that emphasize the primacy of lived experience, situatedness of the researcher, textual reflexivity, multi-vocal perspectives, collaboration, open-ended interview techniques, an ethic of caring which includes personal accountability and responsibility, tacit knowledge, and a grounding in action and praxis (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Denzin, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lather, 1997; Tierney, 1999).

The first method utilized in this research design is unstructured interviews (approximately 45 minutes in length), which I recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes and constructs. I used unstructured interviews as a way to help avoid preconceived categorizations that might hinder the scope and limit the depth of this research inquiry. This structure helps to keep the focus of the interview on the research participants' perspectives and not on my own potential biases (Fontana & Frey, 1998). These unstructured interviews also help to identify key themes and constructs, which the research participants and I further explored through the creation of visual narratives and collages (See Appendix A for a list of open-ended interview questions that were used to begin our research conversations).

I selected four Queer young adults to participate in this research project based upon their abilities to contribute to the research and educational community's knowledge and understanding of the lived and learned experiences of Queer young adults within Alberta learning communities (See Appendix B for research participant consent forms).

Two of the research participants are male and two are female. At the time of their involvement two of the research participants attended high school. The other two

research participants were enrolled in post secondary institutions. All research participants were at one time members of Youth Understanding Youth, which is an Edmonton-based volunteer social/support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Queer, questioning, and straight youth who are under the age of twenty-five.

The four research participants selected for participation in this study represent an array of ethnicities, and sex-and-gender positionalities. I choose to include a seventeen year-old research participant (See Appendix C for parental consent form) in this research project because he was in the process of attempting to start the first gay/straight school alliance (GSA) in an Edmonton and area high school. His experience in attempting to establish a GSA represents a unique counter hegemonic perspective that helps to explore the experiences and resist-stances of Queer young adults within formal educational environments in Alberta. This young adult's experiences in establishing a GSA as a "counterpublic" (Fraser, 1993) educational site within his high school represent key principles of a Queer public pedagogy. Since this youth is "out" to his parents, there is no perceived harm regarding his participation as his parents are fully aware of and support his sexual identity and participation in this research project.

The second method utilized is visual (photographic) narratives and collage (Bach, 1998; Collier & Collier, 1987; Harper, 1998; Pink, 2001; Weiser, 1993). The intent of these visual research techniques is to provide the research participants with an opportunity to become the "image makers of their stories" (Bach, 1998, p. 14). In this visual narrative process the research participants were

asked to compose photographic representations that focused on images, symbols, and metaphors emerging from our earlier unstructured interviews. These photographic representations included the role of friends, family, community, relationships, school experiences, coming out, homophobia, violence, voice, visibility, invisibility, silence, and fear.

By including visual imagery in this research investigation, I am attempting to include multiple forms of representation and voice. Together, the research participants and I deconstructed the "selectively framed information" (Weiser, 1993, p. 56) portrayed in the photographic images and used this information as an alternative way to re/present and make sense of our Queer lives and experiences. Through this deconstructive process we attempted to create a cooperatively produced text that consisted of fragmented discourses and multiple interpretations that invite the reader into the world of the research participant rather than viewing it from a safe and comfortable distance (Harper, 1998).

Instead of taking their own photographs for this research project, two of the research participants created collages using visual images found in everyday magazines and on the Internet. These collages served to represent a postmodern/poststructural photomontage that explores how a person's knowledge of self is constructed through their experiences and interactions with dominant forms of media, education, cultural, and public discourse. The creation of these visual narratives (photographs and collages) has become an important contribution in creating a text that explores how Queer young adults actively seek

to challenge, resist, and invert the normalizing discourses of heteronormativity that so actively permeate their formal and non-formal learning communities.

The third method engaged in this research project utilizes narrative vignettes. Narratives can provide a way for marginalized individuals and groups to reclaim their voices by writing about their own experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 1998). The research participants and I use found poetry techniques to create narratives that address the possibilities, challenges, risks, and resistances that they consider when they determined how visible and vocal they can be in their formal and non-formal educational environments. In keeping with poststructural research methodologies I provided each of the research participants with samples of my own narrative vignettes that explore how I attempted to negotiate my way as a Queer young adult, and then later as a Queer teacher in the formal educational system. As a key component of this poststructural research design the research participants were provided with the opportunity to discuss the themes and images that shaped my narrative, and to question my story and my current role in this research process (Grace, 1997). I have included some of these narratives as intertexts through out the body of this thesis.

By using narrative vignettes as a deliberate strategy in the construction of this text I intend to reclaim important textual and educational space for the missing voices, histories, and experiences of Queer young adults and teachers in adult educational discourse. These silenced voices represent important social, historical, and cultural understandings that influence how educators and

researchers should come to understand the landscape of adult, community, and public educational spaces as inclusive spaces that value and respect the needs and concerns of all students and teachers regardless of sex-and-gender differences.

Kevin

Age 17

Seventeen and Gay

I was twelve when I finally had a word for it.
I told my mom when I was fourteen.
She was fine with it, but there was crying.
Was it sadness or just shock?

My mother doesn't want to see me hurt.
She has images of Matthew Shepard[1] burned deeply in her mind.
She doesn't want to see that happen to me.

It changes the relationship between me and my father.
He asked if I was sure?
There were always indicators.
I was very effeminate when I was younger.
I never had a girlfriend.
I only displayed interest, because I wanted to be like everyone else.
Ya, I'm sure.

My dad doesn't want his family to know.
I guess it must be something to be ashamed of.

I remember thinking that I've got to change this.
I just tried ignoring it.
I tried to be interested in girls.
It didn't work.

It's something that you just learn to live with.
Even now I don't really want to be gay.
I don't think that it's something you want to be.
It's just something you are.

I decided to go to the youth group.
I was tired of being someone I didn't think I was.
I wanted to meet other gay people.
I wanted to share a part of myself that I wasn't able to share.

At the youth group you don't have to worry about looking at someone the wrong way,

---

[1]Matthew Shepard was a twenty-one year old gay man and political science student at the University of Wyoming. On October 6, 1998 Matthew met two young men, who pretended to be gay, in a local bar. They took Matthew to an empty field where they assaulted, robbed, and brutally beat him. They left Matthew tied to a fence to die. Matthew was found the next morning by a cyclist who thought he was a scarecrow. Anti-gay religious protesters picketed outside of Matthew's funeral with signs that read "God Hates Fags" and "Fear God Not Fags". Matthew's killers received two concurrent life sentences for his murder (CNN, 1998; Loffreda, 2000).

or saying the wrong thing.
You can just let it all hang out.
You can be more or less yourself.
You get to see that you are not the only person out there.
Wow, it's not so bad when we can go through it together.

I don't have shame for what I am, at least not anymore.

I realize that this is just me.
Take it or leave it.
If I choose to feel bad about it, then life is just going to suck.
I know some people who think that way and it's terrible.
I don't understand why it's such a big deal.
It's better to come to terms with what you are than to fight it.

Well I didn't choose to be gay,
I'm choosing to be happy.

Lucky People

A few people at school know.
I feel safer on the Internet.
I can be whoever I want to be.
You don't have to worry about homophobia.
They can't kill you through the Internet.

I don't feel safe at home.
I don't flaunt it in front of my dad.

What is gay?
Is gay the way I act?
Or is gay the fact that I like guys?
I struggle with it.

The locker room.
Guys walking around half naked…
I'm seventeen.
I've got eyes.
Sometimes they wander.
Afraid that someone might see.
People know you are gay.
They threaten you.

Ignore it.

I don't want to be singled out.

Name calling.

Shoving.

I don't really remember much.
It's something that I've blocked out.
More or less.

No one likes to be the black sheep.

I've been hit.
I've been kicked.
I've been spat at.

I don't think there is a gay person who hasn't.
If they haven't they are not out or they are very lucky.
I don't think that there are very many **lucky people** out there.

Invisible Alliances

Schools have faltered.
I feel invisible.

In elementary school people don't understand the words gay, Queer, lesbian, or dyke.
It's just a put down.

In junior high you start to understand it.
People start to label themselves.
They start to identify and that's when it started to get bad.
Thirteen-year old boys are cruel.

I just ignored it.
If you ignored it, it didn't continue.

Fag.

I don't like the word.
It's a harsh sounding word.

FAG.

I understand the history behind it.
A pile of sticks tied to someone and set on fire.

Gay.

Gay means happy.
Why do we have to be happy?
It would be nice if we were.

Teachers need to be trained.
People are more accepting of colour, ethnic, and religious backgrounds than they are of sexuality.
Sexuality is the last form of acceptable discrimination.

I tried to start a gay-straight alliance at my school.
An atmosphere where you could be safe.
A place where people could meet at lunch and say,
"OK, I'm gay."
Strength in numbers.

The teacher pulled out.
She was afraid.

Afraid of the impact that it would have on her career.

At first I understood.
Now, I'm not so understanding.

She's a counselor.
That's her job.
She should have found someone else.

When you're kicked down once,
it's hard to get back up.
If she wasn't going to do it,
then no one would.

There was a boy who went to my school.
He would have been my age.
He killed himself because he was gay.
When that happens there is something wrong.

That youth never got a chance.

A gay-straight alliance could make a difference.
Even if the person doesn't attend the meetings,
the resources will be there if they want them or if they ever need them.

Chapter Two

Queer Theory in Education

Introduction

This chapter outlines how the concept *Queer* and the discourse of Queer theory have been applied to the study of education. I will provide pervasive understandings of Queer, and an overview of Queer theory that explores how they have been influenced by postmodern and poststructural thought. Next, I will discuss the major critiques of Queer theory and provide suggestions regarding how Queer theory might potentially inform a more inclusive, transgressive, and liberatory practice. In the next section of this chapter I will situate Queer theory and Queer pedagogy within an adult educational context, and I will discuss the potential benefits and risks of becoming a visibly Queer educator in the classroom. Next, I will explore how I develop a Queer positional pedagogy that places an emphasis on educators of young adults becoming cultural workers who work in the intersections of the curriculum, classroom, and community. I conclude with a discussion reflecting on how I situate myself as critical Queer educator and activist.

Defining Queer

To define Queer I draw upon Grace's (2002) analysis of how Critical Race Theory informs, expands, and problematizes our understandings of Queer theory and sex-and-gender positionalities. I use Grace's analysis in conjunction with Kennedy's (2002) social, legal, cultural, and political deconstruction of the contemporary and historical usage and meanings of the word *Nigger* to explore

and question the concept and contemporary usage of the word Queer. I investigate how these theoretical perspectives can assist educators in exploring the development and implementation of Queer theory, Queer pedagogy, and Queer praxis in adult educational learning environments.

Much like the word Nigger, the word Queer evokes strong personal and political reactions to its usage. Kennedy (2002) in his sociocultural analysis of the word Nigger poses provocative questions that can also carefully be applied to problematize the word Queer. How should Queer be defined? Who gets to define it? Why does the word Queer generate such a powerful and at times controversial reaction? Who has the authority and legitimacy to use the word Queer? In what contexts is the use of the word Queer acceptable or unacceptable? Should lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons be allowed to use the word Queer in ways that are forbidden by others? How has the word Queer been reclaimed from a pejorative usage to one of political, social, cultural, and educational signification? How has the word Queer become a key contested word in the (re)creation of new political, cultural, and social movements within LGBT communities? What does the future of the word Queer hold? (Kennedy, 2002, p. 3-4).

The etymological origins of the word Queer mean "across - it comes from the Indo-European root – *terwekw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist)" (Sedgwick, 1993a, p. xii, italics added). The word Queer "derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, [and] insult" (Butler,

1993, p. 226). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons have actively sought to reclaim the term Queer as a source of pride, and to refute the historical discursive performative function of the word that seeks to enact narrow minoritizing identity categorizations based upon a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity. As Kumashiro (2001) suggests "Queers do not ignore the harmful history of ignorance, discrimination, hatred and violence carried with the term" (p. 3), rather they use the term as an urgent and insurgent way of reclaiming and restorying history in an attempt to transgress and disrupt heteronormativity and homophobia. In this sense, the term Queer is claimed as much as a personal identity as it is a political marker.

Queer has become a complex and fluid terminology that surrounds itself with a necessary ambiguity that allows it to continue to grow and expand in ways that "can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, post colonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 8-9). Sedgwick (1990) further explains that Queer and

> an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of [the] modern homo/heterosexual definition (p. 1).

In academe to Queer something is to "analyze a situation or text to determine the relationship between sexuality, power, gender and conceptions of normal and deviant, insider and outsider" (Dilley, 1999, p. 458; also see Fuss, 1991). Using this analysis, Queer theory post-discourse asks questions such as: Who produces knowledge? Who can have knowledge? How is knowledge

circulated and for what purposes? By asking these kinds of questions, Queer theory presents several key critical challenges that call into question traditional epistemologies and binary thinking by "deconstructing the categories, oppositions and equations that sustain them" (Jagose, 1996, p. 7). Queer theory through this perpetual deconstruction and reconstruction process attempts to question discourse production and the constructed silences that seek to render Queer persons and Queer subjects voiceless and invisible (de Laurentis, 1991). de Laurentis (1991) further encourages us to think about how Queerness can be reconstructed to "act as an agency of social change, and [how] our theory [might] construct another discursive horizon, another way of living the radical and the sexual" (p. xi).

Lesbian and gay studies have traditionally taken up the positionality of the outsider to interrogate how sexual borders and margins are constructed and enacted (Fuss, 1991). Queer theory seeks to build on lesbian and gay studies in an effort to invert the terms of reference and definitions of what constitutes normal by working from the inside out. It destabilizes notions of heteronormativity by positioning Queer as normal.

Warner (1994) suggests that Queer theory, politics, and sexuality

> act as an agency of social process[es] whose mode[s] of functioning [are] both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference, demanding political representation while insisting on its material and historical specificity (p. iii).

As critical educators, by taking a Queer position, we call into question "what may be known, who may be the knower, and how knowledge has come to be generated

and circulated" in our classrooms (Honeychurch, 1996, p. 339). This questioning allows us to think outside of heterosexual epistemologies, examine the implications of the body and the erotic, and decenter heteronormativity and its discourses of power relationships, fixed identities, and binary thinking (Honeychurch, 1996; Sedgwick 1990). Queer theory, like Critical Race Theory, seeks to question and deconstruct power relationships and transform education into a potentially transforming and liberatory practice.

In describing Queer theory, Honeychurch (1996) suggests that the

> familiar term 'gay/lesbian sensibilities' does not adequately account for either the multiplicity of differences (race, class, ethnicity, ect.) within those identities, or the anticipation of common grounds between them. It is perhaps the more expansive term 'Queer' that most possibilities emerge for denominating and declaring a range of differences and positions arising from the gamut of sexual diversities. (p. 341)

Queer, in this sense, takes on a postmodern and poststructural construct as it continually changes in relationship to what is considered the norm. Queer theory seeks to transcend limitations, and ultimately strives to build communities across differences. Sex-and-gender positionalities and possibilities are "no longer thinkable in terms of the simple inside/outside dialectic" (Fuss, 1991, p. 1). Instead, Queer theory seeks to question how we can rupture the hetero/homosexual binary and asks questions, such as, how can we produce a heterosexual self if there is no homosexual other? One possible solution to this dilemma is for Queer theory and Queer activism to define itself against the "normal rather than the heterosexual" (Warner, 1994, p. xxvi). In this sense, Queer represents a "resistance to the regimes of normal" (Warner, 1994, p. xxvi) in which Queer is always "a site of collective contestation … [that can] never be

fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, Queered from a prior usage in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (Butler, 1993, p. 228).

Queer: A postmodern/poststructural perspective

By approaching social, cultural, and political knowledges "from a Queered position [we gain] a post modern rejection of epistemological certainty" (Honeychurch, 1996, p. 343). However, until heterosexual knowledge and privilege are no longer

> presumed to be absolute and universal, and until inchoate Queer subjects and theories are no longer forced into 'straight-acting' and 'straight-looking' guise, the possibilities of Queered knowledges will not come out of the epistemological closet (Honeychurch, 1996, p. 344).

McLaren and McDonough (1996) suggest that modernist "conceptions of the self, family, and sexuality… have provided fixed constructions, or legitimating norms, of what counts as appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour" (p. 373). Critical Queer postmodern and poststructural theory attempts to unsettle fixed identities, understand difference, and develop multivocality as a way to decenter and disturb traditional institutionalized educational discourses (McLaren and McDonough, 1996; Tierney, 1997). This Queered approach attempts to disrupt these (hetero)normative discourses and discursive practices by challenging the logic of rationality, authority, and the search for absolute Truths (Tierney, 1997).

A turn to critical theory and analysis, in combination with postmodern ideals, can help to shift our thinking into constructing a more practical discourse that seeks to build upon "critical reasoning and the creation of conditions within which oppressed peoples will be able to liberate themselves" (McLaren and

McDonough, 1996, p. 374). This critical praxis seeks to build empowered communities based on difference: not a politics of exclusion (Kenway & Modra, 1995). A careful critical examination of societal norms and expectations brings with it the realization that the "themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture, [which] means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are" (Warner, 1994, p. xiii).

Yet, a further turn to postmodern feminist theory and postcolonial studies can show us how Queer persons are engaged in multiple, differential subject positions that are "historically specific, spread across multiple modalities of difference and entangled in the hierarchical structuring of class, [ability,] sexual, racial, and gendered subject positions" (McLaren and McDonough, 1996, p. 374). By focusing on creating understandings across these differences, and by recognizing the multiple identities (and subject positions) that persons (i.e. teachers and students) can have, "individuals come to understand their own and others' lives through prolonged engagement with the Other. Rather than assume that one's identity is fixed and determined, we are constantly in the process of redefinition and discovery" (Tierney, 1993, p. 143).

The major critique with this Queer postmodern and poststructural perspective (and some post-discourses have moved beyond it) is that it parallels some postmodern/poststructural perspectives that refuse to name subject positions. When this refusal occurs individual experience and identity remain unknown, unexpressed, and unexamined. For example, the micro category of

lesbian and macro category of female would not exist, as only the generic category of Queer is of importance. By not naming our individual identities are we silencing important voices? Should we (or can we) ignore the specificities of class, ability, gender, and race? By silencing female identities and voices are we evoking a patriarchal framework? Is a unified identity necessary for effective political action (Kirsch, 2000)? These are important questions that need to be addressed when we examine Queer theory and its postmodern claim that identity is always a site under construction, a site of a permanent state of questioning, becoming, and resisting (Jagose, 1996, p. 131).

Reclaiming Queer

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons have used the word Queer for very different purposes than the ways in which homophobes have used the word to ridicule, protest, and pathologize LGBT persons. Queer persons have reclaimed Queer as a way to poke fun, to protest, to problematize, to act up, and to act out against those who would attack them or attempt to render them invisible and silent in cultural, political, historical, and educational discourses. Talking Queer, acting Queer, and living Queer all serve as visible and vocal ways to contest how society has perceived and constructed Queer persons as abnormal, deviant, and outsider. Queer represents a challenge to notions of citizenship and (un)civil society. Queer persons, politics, and pedagogy are inassimilable as they seek to invert the normal and refuse a "politics of respectability" (Kennedy, 2002, p. 170) that previous lesbian and gay movements have sought to achieve. As Audre Lorde (1984) states and Queer theory would echo, "the master's tools will

never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never bring genuine change" (p. 112).

Queer is about independence from our masters; it is not about a measure of tolerance, respectability, or accommodation. To be Queer is to problematize understandings and constructions of gender, sexuality, and identity. Queer is an insurgent discourse that strives to reclaim and historicize our lives and culture in the face of those homophobes who would rather see us rendered silent and voiceless through systematic violence, oppression, and invisibility. Being Queer means that we will "never forget, until never again" (Grace & Wells, 2001, p. 149) the faces of Matthew Shepard, Aaron Webster[2], and Brandon Teena[3] and the countless other Queer persons who have been verbally and physically beaten into silence and submission.

Speaking Queerly

Kennedy's (2002) analysis of who has the authority and legitimacy to use the word Nigger provides an insightful dialogue that can inform similar issues within the Queer community. There is nothing wrong with a straight person using the word Queer. To contest who can use the word Queer and to limit when and where they can use it only serves to reinforce the homo/heterosexual binary and the us/them modality that Queer strives to disrupt. Queers do not and should not have an epistemological monopoly on the usage and meanings of the word Queer.

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[2] On November 17, 2001 Aaron Webster, a gay man, was beaten to death in Stanley Park, Vancouver, British Columbia. His murder remained unsolved for more than a year. A nineteen-year old man (who was seventeen at the time of the murder) was arrested and charged with Aaron's murder on February 12, 2003 (Kirkby, 2003).

[3] Brandon Teena was a transgender young adult who was shot and murdered on New Year's Eve, 1993. His story was later made into the Academy Award winning movie *Boys Don't Cry*. Brandon's murderer is now serving a life sentence on death row in Nebraska (Reardon, n.d.).

If Queer is to live up to its radical, political, and pedagogical potential than it ought to include and value the voices of heterosexual allies in its spectral community. What is of crucial importance is the intention of the speaker and the context in which the word is spoken. Queer can be taken to mean many "different things depending upon the intonation, location of the interaction, and the relationship between the speaker to those to whom he [or she] is speaking" (Kennedy, 2002, p. 54).

Contesting Queer

Cohen's (2001) critique of Queer theory suggests that Queer politics and Queer studies have not moved beyond binary constructions, but rather have served to reinforce the "simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything 'queer'" (p. 540). What Queer theory has failed to examine is the ways in which power relationships inform and privilege the construction of certain subject positions. For example, gay white males are often in the positions of power and privilege within the Queer movement itself, which limits the recognition of racial, class, ability, and gender hierarchies and differences (Kusmashiro, 2001; McLaren and McDonough, 1996). As a result, Queer has often been produced as a very "White thing" (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 4). If Queer theory and Queer politics are to become a truly inclusive, liberating, and transformative experience we need to ask the difficult question: Is Queer theory really *Queer* or is it a form of regulatory (read white class privileged male) discourse in disguise? As Kumashiro (2001) states "Queer movements that are ONLY about sexuality risk complying

with other oppressions and excluding their own margins" (Emphasis in original, p. 5).

Cohen (2001) suggests that the truly transformative power of the Queer movement lies within the margins of the Queer community itself (p. 541-542). For Queer theory to have any radical potential it should serve as "more than just an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered" subject positions and move towards a more problematic understanding of power relations and identity politics (Cohen, 2001, p. 542). Queer theory ought to interrogate and problematize the multiple, intersecting, and at times conflicting, sources of oppression, power, and privilege that are complicated by the categories of race, gender, ethnicity, ability, and class.

Queer theory breaks down when it uses sexuality as the primary theoretical lens (Sedgwick, 1990) in which "heterosexuals are represented as dominant and controlling and all Queers are understood as marginalized and invisible" (Cohen, 2001, p. 542). In this sense, sexuality is prioritized as the universal discourse through which Queer politics and Queer knowledge is given voice. This universalizing lens inhibits the transformative potential of Queer theory. The question that contemporary Queer theory should ask is: How do we transform traditional understandings of Queer theory and Queer politics into a truly liberating, inclusive, and transgressive practice (Cohen, 2001)?

We can begin to answer this question by examining how Queer discourse and Queer movements have historically excluded the voices of lesbians and bisexuals, and more recently have perpetuated the marginalization of Queer

people of colour and transgender persons. New movements in Queer theory have sought to address these absences by expanding the Queer theoretical lens to move away from a singular model of oppression based on the minoritization of sexual object choice to a more sophisticated analysis of race, gender, class, and ability (Butler, 1993; Kumashiro, 2001).

The truly transformative aspect of Queer theory lies within its ability to build coalitions across sexual categories in an attempt to "recognize the potential for shared resistance" that refuses to collapse our understandings of power relationships into a single monolithic discourse (Cohen, 2001, p. 548). As Cohen (2001) suggests, "differentials in power exist within all socially named categories… one's relation to dominant power serves as the basis of unity for radical coalition work in the twenty-first century" (p. 549).

Our understandings of what it means to take on a Queered perspective and analytical framework ought to be expanded to include the intersections of the multiple, contested, and shifting discourses of power that permeate our understandings of what it means to be, become, and belong as full persons regardless of our sexual, racial, gender, class, or ability subject positions.

Staying in or coming out: Becoming visibly Queer in the classroom

Khayatt (1997 & 1998) questions the political and pedagogical value of coming out, in the form of a declarative statement, as a lesbian or gay educator in the classroom. Khayatt (1998) makes a clear distinction between coming out in public school environments versus adult educational spaces. She states that because public school teachers (K-12) teach children, and not adults, they have a

series of different issues to confront when they choose to come out to their students (Khayatt, 1998, p. 35). Normalizing educational discourses seek to de-sexualize students and teachers, and work to institute a hegemonic discourse of innocence and purity that must be maintained and protected at all costs (Silin, 1995). A teacher who comes out to her or his students in a public school setting violates these sacred discourses. As Khayatt (1998) suggests, "A teacher's coming out to students, which, by its very nature, is an allusion to sexual matters, is consequently deemed outside the realm of what is considered appropriate for children to know or discuss" (p. 35). This sexual knowledge becomes dangerous public knowledge that could have severe consequences on the personal and professional lives of public school teachers (Epstein & Sears, 1999; Grace, 2001b). So then, should educators who teach adults strive to come out in their classrooms? Will they face less personal and professional risks than public school teachers?

Khayatt (1998) argues that the question of coming out in the classroom stems from five key assumptions. The first being that lesbian and gay students would feel supported and reinforced to see a lesbian or gay teacher in their classroom. Second, by being an out lesbian or gay teacher one may become a role model for lesbian and gay students. Third, being an out teacher unsettles the heteronormativity of a school. Fourth, by remaining silent and not coming out, a teacher's silence institutionalizes heterosexism and homophobia. Fifth, by coming out a teacher puts their "body on the line," which is a necessary prerequisite for political action and dialogue (p. 37).

Khayatt (1997) argues that it is not necessarily teachers' private lives, as LGBT persons, that is at issue when they come out in the classroom, but their "public persona, their image as a teacher, as a representative of the state and all the ideological implications which that position entails" (p. 129). From Khayatt's perspective, to come out in the classroom serves to fix one's identity as an LGBT person. This fixed identity can be used as a lens in which students filter what they hear and see in the classroom. As teachers we have no way to be sure of how students will read our act of disclosure. Will our (or our student's) race, ethnicity, class, ability, or sex-and-gender differences interfere with our intended reading of our coming out? By coming out are we imposing personal and private information on our students? By coming out to our students in the form of a declarative statement, such as when I say that "I am a gay man", do I run the risk of becoming a text for my students (Khayatt, 1998)? Instead of the curriculum becoming the focal point do our bodies and sexuality become the center of our pedagogy? An additional problem is created when students perceive a visibly LGBT teacher as speaking for and representing a diverse and differentially situated membership of the Queer community. Khayatt (1998) suggests that in order to come out as an LGBT person we must assume that these identities are fixed and unchanging categories. To come out and fix one's identity would be to ignore the historical, political, and social contexts and power relationships that shape and define Queer identity constructions. As Butler (1993) and Fuss (1991) suggest identities are performative and as such cannot be stable, but instead should be viewed as fluid, multiple, and situational.

Mindful of Khayatt's (1998) comments, I still choose to make myself a visibly Queer educator. From my perspective, my visibility is not as much a political statement as a personal one. Coming out becomes a matter of personal integrity and authenticity in my identity as an educator. By being closeted I face personal isolation, alienation, self-hatred, and frustration. I left the classroom because I felt that I could not be an authentic educator (Wells, 2001/2003). I felt as though I could not share an important part of myself with my students. As a critical educator I strongly believe that my Queer identity informs my teaching perspectives and practices. Yet, I had to keep this important influence hidden from my students. Not only was I doing a disservice to myself, I was negating an important educational opportunity in which my students could potentially learn about difference and diversity.

My visibility as a Queer person is a resistance to the status quo and a challenge to the power of normalizing institutions and, as such, can provide a potential space for students to question their beliefs and assumptions about Queer teachers and Queer issues. Hopefully, my visibility and dialogue will encourage students to recognize and examine their own subject positions, and lead them to question the role of educational and cultural discourses in fixing identities, maintaining binaries, and policing the status quo. By voicing and living out this counter narrative I attempt to fill in the Queer absences that exist in school curricula and foster a climate in which students are supported in finding their own voices, sharing their stories, and discovering their differences.

Silin (1999) suggests that there are always risks when we come out in the classroom as "our words and our lives are often misunderstood and misrepresented. Naming confines and controls. Articulation belies the power of the unrepresentable. But silence is the denial of pedagogical responsibility" (p. 104). The risk is always that our Queerness will be held against us, but I believe that the benefits of visibility out weigh the risks of silence. Yes, we do need to consider the context and audience when we come out in the classroom. For example, would it be safe for me to come out in a Catholic school or university? Would I be supported? Vilified? Pathologized? Would it be safe for me to come out if I were a sessional, substitute, or probationary teacher? Perhaps, in these situations a Queer person may not to be able to come out directly, but the subject matter that they present and the inclusiveness that they provide in their classroom, curriculum, and dialogue can provide challenges to institutionalized discourses. Such discursivity might encourage students to question and examine their own positionalities and surroundings.

Ultimately the decision of whether to come out in the classroom ought to remain with each individual educator (Khayatt, 1998). Each educator needs to examine critically the personal, pedagogical, and political risks and realities that underlie the act of coming out within their own differentially situated contexts.

Creating a Queer pedagogy

"Clearly, the distance from queer theory to queer pedagogy is great…. And so the question remains – what could be made 'queer' about pedagogy" (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 298)?

What does Queer theory have to offer students and teachers? What if Queer theory was "understood as offering a way to rethink the very grounds of knowledge and pedagogy in education" (Britzman, 1995, p. 151)? What would this education look like? To answer these questions critical, inclusive educators should explore and consider two important pedagogical viewpoints. The first viewpoint asks us to examine our personal teaching practices. The second encourages us to consider how institutional structures create hegemonic conditions that celebrate and legitimate some forms of knowledge and silence others (Britzman, 1995).

When we closely examine our individual teaching practices we should be encouraged to reflect on how our pedagogy demonstrates an ethic of respect. This ethic of respect encourages discourses of diversity, makes difference visible, and provides for multiple voices and perspectives in the classroom. When we examine what I term an institutionalized pedagogy (such as the way institutions teach teachers), we should strive to encourage teachers to scrutinize the "structures of disavowal" (Britzman, 1995, p. 151) in education, and question any curriculum, educational culture, or community that views difference as a disruption, something that can be managed, or as something outside the realm of normalcy. To bring a Queer discourse to our educational practice is to learn, unlearn, and relearn through critical, personal, political, cultural, and social critique and analysis.

Unlike some other theoretical discourses Queer theory is not a singular body of knowledge or skills. Queer theory offers a critique of normalcy as it

problematizes the status quo and calls into question what can be considered as knowledge. Britzman (1995) affirms that "Queer theory offers education techniques to make sense of and remark upon what it cannot bear to know" (p. 153). In this sense Queer theory seeks to make the unknowable known. Queer theory strives to move beyond binary oppositions (hetero/homosexual, inside/outside, masculine/feminine), and strives to pose questions that ask how education, knowledge, and identity work to fashion the "structures of thinkability and the limits of thought" (Britzman 1995, p. 160).

Bryson and de Castell (1993) define Queer pedagogy as a "radical form of educative praxis implemented to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of 'normalcy' in schooled subjects" (p. 285). The beginnings of this Queer pedagogy works to question the structures of intelligibility and seeks to imagine the possibilities to "exceed the injuries of [educational] discourse so that all bodies matter" (Britzman 1995, p. 161; Butler, 1993). While Queer theory "transgresses the stabilities of the representational, [Queer] pedagogy situates the problem of normalcy in classroom sites and worries about the social production of the learning self" (Britzman, 1998, p. 50). Too often we search for and develop a comfortable pedagogy in our classrooms. This comfortable pedagogy becomes a pedagogy without contradictions (Britzman, 1998). Queer pedagogy seeks to problematize "how knowledge of bodies and bodies of knowledge become a site of [hetero]normalization" in our educational practices (Britzman, 1998, p. 50). In other words, the question for educators to ask might be: How can we begin to understand difference differently in our classrooms and teaching practices?

A Queer pedagogical praxis ought to move beyond a simple set of skills, series of questions, or rules to follow. A Queer praxis is one that involves "reflexive oppositional action undertaken within key sites for the production of oppression … [that are not] optional so long as anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, sexism, classism and other forms of hegemonic violence continue to proliferate within educational (and other) contexts" (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 288). A Queer pedagogy exists as a series of tensions that need to be negotiated as educators and students are asked to "consider the grounds of their own possibility, their own intelligibility, and [to partake in the challenging] work of proliferating their own identifications and critiques that can exceed identity as essence, explanation, causality, or transcendence" (Britzman, 1998, p. 51).

Queer pedagogy seeks to disrupt the everyday routine and normalization of the classroom and school where violence and identity erasure towards Queer persons are systemically institutionalized. Queer pedagogy defiantly questions how some students and teachers are allowed to have *everyday* lives and experiences, yet when Queer issues are included in the classroom they are considered to be a *special* occurrence or disruption to the everyday operations (read heteronormative discourse) of the classroom and school experience (Britzman, 1998). A Queer pedagogy is radical in its very nature as it undertakes an oppositional theorizing that seeks to invert hegemonic discourses of normalcy by striving to make Queer normal (Bryson & de Castell, 1993). This radical Queer pedagogy engages us

> to explore and to articulate a set of pedagogical practices that might offer greater opportunities than those currently available to both students and

> teachers 'of difference' for the construction of, and participation in, democratic, engaging, pleasurable, interesting, generative, and non-violent learning environments (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 299).

To counter the effects of heteronormative educational structures and discursive practices Quinlivan and Town (1999) suggest four distinct Queer discourses that highlight potential possibilities for affirming sex-and-gender differences in schools: "(1) provision of venues, (2) abnormalizing the normal, (3) dissolving the boundaries, (4) forming alliances" (p. 518).

Quinlivan and Town (1999) stress the importance of creating educational venues where heteronormativity is deconstructed, discussed, and explored, rather than presumed (p. 518). Through this process, Queer young adults may begin to view their experiences as empowering, and they are enabled to explore how educational discourses and discursive practices work within school environments to make them feel "abnormal". By examining these discourses, students begin to see how heterosexual identity, as it is represented and reinforced within school culture and curricula serve to limit and regulate student identities, behaviour, and feelings.

As Quinlivan and Town (1999) suggest, these critical educational venues can provide students and teachers with the opportunity to explore and affirm sex-and-gender differences and identity development as an integral part of the schooling process (p. 519). By abnormalizing the normal, Quinlivan and Town (1999) believe, that as critical educators, we work to problematize heterosexuality and decenter notions of normalcy by questioning what is considered normal, and by examining who decides what constitutes normal behaviour. In this sense,

Queer theory also questions the benefits of LGBT persons being normalized by heterosexual society. Does being normalized equate to being tolerated only when we fit into mainstream definitions of what normal behaviour is? Queer theory rejects conceptions of normalization and tolerance as an identity limiting, non-inclusive, and discursive practice that limits expressions of diversity and difference, and instead, works to maintain the status quo and its structures of knowledge, power, and control.

Queer pedagogy seeks to position Queer as normal and heteronormativity as the discourse to be examined and challenged. By inverting the terms of reference Queer theory and Queer pedagogy strive to make classrooms places in which *all* students have the opportunity to understand and negotiate their identities. A Queer pedagogy attempts to provide the opportunity to dissolve boundaries and move beyond the simplistic homo/heterosexual binary in a safe, affirmative, and inclusive environment.

Queer pedagogy's emphasis on fluidity, diversity, and difference provides the potential for creating more inclusive practices for Queer young adults. Gay/Straight Alliances (in K-12 and post secondary institutions) can play a powerful role and provide a broad source of support for all students who are questioning their identities. Gay/Straight Alliances help to acknowledge and affirm Queer voices and identities as they struggle to be heard (and in many cases survive) in heteronormative educational environments. These alliances can provide strategic spaces in which Queer young adults and their allies can create a language of hope and a space for possibility that affords them the opportunity to

move beyond hegemonic heteronormative discourses that seek to fix identities, silence voices, and reinforce binary constructions. As Britzman (1995) reminds us "there is more to identity than meets the eye and individuals do not live their identity as hierarchies, as stereotypes, or in installments" (p. 65).

Queer young adults are the people at the forefront of a new radical, personal, political, and pedagogical movement that seeks to expand and problematize our understanding of culture, politics, and pedagogy. Many Queer young adults are tired of being categorized and pathologized as deviants. These Queer young adults are shouting "We're here, we're Queer, and we're in your school!" How will educators and administrators respond to this newly formed radical public pedagogy that demands visibility, voice, and inclusion as it embraces and celebrates difference? Our world is growing Queerer each day. How will educators respond? Will they continue to fear this aspect of a Queer planet (Warner, 1994)?

Queering adult education

My work as a Queer critical adult educator and cultural worker draws upon the theoretical frameworks of adult educators André P. Grace (2000, 2001a&b), Paulo Freire (1998), and Elizabeth J. Tisdell (1995, 1998). It is focused on developing a positional pedagogy that places an emphasis on adult educators becoming responsive and responsible cultural workers who "think the practice" (Freire, 1998, p. 77) as they make connections with "adult education as a field of study and a field of practice" (Grace, 2000, p. 57). As a cultural worker, I strive to develop an inclusive pedagogical approach that recognizes and explores

the dominant culture-power nexus that exists in the intersections of instrumental, social, political, and cultural education (Grace, 1997). By creating a positional pedagogy I situate myself as a critical educator who works to create emancipatory learning communities and educational practices that empower learners to think and act towards the transformative possibilities of social change.

An educator's positionality is inherently connected to classroom dynamics that influence the teaching-learning interaction. A positional pedagogy provides the framework for an adult educator to engage in a critical analysis that investigates the connections between learners, teachers, cultural identities, situational contexts, and educational practice. If adult educators are to become effective and credible mediators in the teaching-learning relationship, then it is necessary to eliminate what Freire (1989) describes as the discrepancy between the testimony of saying and the testimony of doing. All adult educators should consider the ramifications of their pedagogical approaches. Adult educators cannot afford to disconnect their words from actions, which means that they need to consciously engage knowing, speaking, listening, and doing as elements of teaching and learning that shape critical adult educational spaces.

My work as a critical adult educator and cultural worker attempts to problematize limiting discourses and perspectives, and seeks to expand our understandings of cultural difference and multiculturalism here in Canada (Grace et. al., in press). Our current Canadian multiculturalism policy is grounded in Bilingualism and Biculturalism. A more meaningful definition of multiculturalism is needed to expand our notion of culture in the Canadian context. This definition

should attempt to address relationships of power and seek to create a recognized space for sex-and-gender differences (Grace& Hill, 2001). In order to become a truly multicultural society we ought to examine and question how we really understand multiculturalism and seek to expand our understandings of cultural difference beyond visible representations of race, ethnicity, gender, and language.

As a critical educator and change agent, I seek to transform my teaching practice into an inclusive and liberatory space that strives to include multiple voices and perspectives in the curriculum, classroom, and community. At the curriculum level, I have worked with the Alberta Teachers' Associations' (ATA) Safe and Caring Schools Project and the ATA's Diversity, Equity, and Human Rights Committee to present and develop resources that attempt to help educators and community workers address homophobia and heterosexism within their school and community educational environments (Wells, 2002a&b).

In the university classroom, my Queer visibility attempts to provide a space and place for the discussion of sex-and-gender differences in education. By speaking out and revealing my Queerness, I attempt to allow difference to reside in the classroom as a topic for exploration and discussion. In the community, my work has focused on educating Queer young adults and their allies by developing and facilitating workshops at events like the Diversity Conferences of Alberta Society's bi-annual conference *"Embracing Spirituality, Embracing Sexuality"*. These conferences and workshops encompass a diverse spectrum of educationally and spiritually focused topics that provide the educative space for many Queer young adults, and allied community members to come together in a safe and

supportive setting to explore their differences, question their feelings, and embrace their identities as whole persons.

My other community educational involvements center on helping to develop and support a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, straight, Queer, and questioning youth group in Edmonton, Alberta. *Youth Understanding Youth* (YUY) represents a non-formal learning community where young adults can receive the support and understanding of their peers in an environment that is monitored by professionals who are sensitive to Queer issues (Grace & Wells, 2001). YUY does not operate through a formal curriculum, but instead is based upon the lived curriculum of its members. By focusing on the lived and learned experiences of its membership YUY creates a learning community that seeks to empower these young adults and attempts to help educate them by accounting for the educational absences and constructed silences that exist in many formal educational environments. This educational project is designed around five rotating topics that alternate from week to week. These topics include: (1) *Discussion Nights* where members explore contemporary issues that impact their daily lives and experiences. Recent discussions have focused on safer sex practices, drug and alcohol use. We have also had a Queer history night where members shared readings and discussions about the Stonewall Riots[4] and the

[4] The Stonewall Riots, which occurred in New York City in the month of June in 1969, are often cited as a significant turning point in the history of the North American Queer civil rights movement. The Stonewall Riots represented one of the first times that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people fought back against overt discrimination and harassment by rioting in the streets of New York City. After the riots, a new more visible and vocal attitude emerged that demanded for the fair and equal treatment of Queer persons (Duberman, 1994).

hidden Holocaust[5]. (2) *Activity Nights* provide youth group members with the opportunity to participate in safe, all ages events like beach volleyball, bowling, and skating. (3) *Sharing our Stories* night creates a space for one of the youth group members to take center stage and share his or her story about their *coming out* and *coming to terms* experiences as a Queer youth in Alberta. (4) *Movie Night* focuses on viewing and discussing Queer themed movies that many youth group members do not have the chance to safely watch in their own home environments. Recent examples of movies that the group has watched include *The Matthew Shepard Story* and *The Prom Fight* (The Story of Ontario teenager Marc Hall[6] and his legal battle to take his boyfriend to his grade twelve Prom). (5) *Fringe Night* is considered a special night at the youth group where members are invited to share their special talents with the group. In the past YUY members have read poetry, shared artwork, music, dance, or any other "hidden" talent that they might wish to share.

Through these curriculum, classroom, and community involvements I attempt to live out a positional pedagogy as I bring together my roles as an educator of young adults and as a cultural worker in an attempt to increase Queer visibility and possibility, stimulate a critical dialogue, and challenge heteronormativity within formal and non-formal educational spaces. This work as a cultural change agent involves substantial personal risk. As I continue to speak

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[5] The hidden Holocaust refers to the thousands of Queer persons who were killed in concentration camps in Nazi Germany during World War II (Heinz, 1994).

[6] Ontario teenager Marc Hall fought to take his boyfriend to his high school prom. On May 10th, 2002 Ontario Superior Court Justice MacKinnon granted an interlocutory injunction restraining the Durham Catholic District School Board from preventing Marc Hall from attending his high school prom with his boyfriend. The School Board has appealed this decision and the case is still before the courts in Ontario.

out my visibility increases, and I risk the potential of fewer job opportunities in a politically conservative province. When I speak out my Queer identity is not something that I can control. Others might develop an image of me that might be encouraging and supportive, or they might label me as political, radical, or unprofessional. Over the past three years anonymous notes have appeared tacked to my office door at the university. One such note included a questionnaire from Sexualholics Anonymous. The hand written note attached to the questionnaire asked me to identify how many of the questions in the brochure were applicable to my life as a Queer person.

This has not stopped me from being an out and proud Queer educator who addresses sex-and-gender differences in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. I make few apologies for informing students and faculty about their legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities to create safe, caring, and inclusive learning communities for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students and teachers. My emphasis on bringing a Queer perspective and voice to adult education places me on the margins of the profession. Regardless of how I am perceived, I strongly believe that critical adult education should strive to create a meaningful space and place for Queer students, Queer teachers, and a Queer curriculum. Empowering adult education needs to be an inclusive and respectful experience that embraces and celebrates *all* forms of diversity and difference, not just those experiences that are comfortable for socially and culturally mainstream students and teachers.

Empowering adult education seeks to create learners who strive to engage and reflect upon issues of freedom, democracy, and social justice. As critical adult educators, when we teach students to reflect critically on their experience, our pedagogy becomes alive, learning is relevant, and our students can begin to gain a sense of self-empowerment. It is only when we understand the discursive practices and dominant discourses that surround us that we will truly become empowered to reflect on and make personal and societal changes. Once we begin to value our own experiences and the experiences of others as central and significant, education can move from a process of transmission to a process of transforming life experience (hooks, 1994).

Concluding Remarks

Queer theory in education attempts to create possibilities for *all* students and teachers to explore the "questions of social categories, including sexuality and desires of the body, as relational, contextual, and specific issues of power and control" (Lewis and Karin, 1994, p.205). As critical adult educators who turn to Queer theory to build a positional pedagogy of difference, we work to situate classrooms as empowering places. These classrooms can be places that seek to provide a meaningful place for all learners to be, become, and belong as full, valued, and contributing participants in inclusive learning. They can be places where learners have the capacities to contest, destabilize, and question hegemonic educational practices that seek to marginalize individuals, fix identities, and celebrate the status quo.

Jordana

Age 19

The Scars Remind Me

The Ellen Show.
My mom, dad, and I used to watch that show.
Then on that one day, during that one episode, Ellen was coming out.
My parents refused to watch it.

I realized that they thought that she was gross for being gay.
It was my first clue that my parents didn't like homosexuals.
I kept quiet for a long time after that.
I thought that maybe I was bad or wrong.
I journaled to myself.
I talked to myself.
I researched.
I started feeling like I was alone.

When I figured out that my parents didn't know that I was gay,
it was really disappointing.
I didn't know that I had to come out.
I've known that I'm gay all along.

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I've been slashing myself since grade eight.
Slashing became an escape for me.
Whenever I got depressed or when something went wrong,
I slashed more.

These aren't fancy scars or tattoos.
These are horrific scars.
You can tell it's from madness.

It's nothing to be ashamed of.
The scars remind me of all the hard days that I had to go through,
just to come out.

Every single scar has a meaning.
They remind me of different events.

The very recent scars will probably be the last ones ever.
I really blacked out after those ones.
I had to get stitches.
I walked from my home to the lesbian bar.
So many people helped me there.
I realized that I wasn't alone.
I don't need to do things like this.
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It's over.

I feel like there is support and hope.
There are people who will listen to me.
I have support now.
I just have to learn to use it in a positive way,
until eventually I become a support for myself.

My Journal

I come home from school and realized that my parents have read my diary.
That's how I came out.
My dad was amazingly mad.
My mom was sitting on the couch and she gave me this dirty look.

I can't believe that you read **my journal**.

All I heard was yelling that day.
I just had to get out of the house.
I was hungry and tired.
I'm leaving.
It's all over.

I wandered through the alleys.
Where do I go?
I can't go home.
There's no way I can go home.

I ended up in a safe house for ten months.

I'm living independently now.
The relationship with my parents is getting better.
I still feel like I have to keep coming out to them.

Since I've come out, I'm more happy.
I'm really comfortable with myself.

My parents came to my house.
I was very surprised.
The walked into my bedroom.
My big pride flag was hanging on the wall.

I think that my parents are becoming more open.
Either they understand me or I will become a stranger to them.

I am respecting their boundaries,
so now I want them to respect me.

Pray For Me

A new young teacher.
I come out to her.
She asks, *"Why?"*
"What's wrong with men?"
She was shocked.

I couldn't get her to understand that it's OK.

"I don't understand, you're such a beautiful girl."

"I'm sure that a lot of the guys in the classroom really like you."

She was feeling sorry for me because I'm gay.

I was really strong.
I had my chin up.

"Are you sure this isn't a phase?"

"Were you raped by a guy?"

It's not about that.
It's just my orientation.
She couldn't get it.

She said that she was going to "***pray for me*** *to become straight*."

No.

Pray for me to get better marks.
Pray for me to have a better relationship with my parents.

Please don't pray for me to be straight.
That is not going to happen.

She had this look of shock on her face.

What a sheltered teacher.
I thought it was funny.

Teachers and counselors at school are the people who work with kids.
I think that they should know better.

If I hadn't been out and gone through what I did,
I might have let her pray for me.
I was scared then.
I was in hiding.

Now, I know so many other homosexuals, transgenders, and drag queens.
I'm involved in the community.
I'm a lot stronger.

Don't pray for me now.
Pray for the others who are scared.
Pray for the others who are in hiding.
Don't pray for me to change.

Pride

Pride pins on my backpack as I walk down the hallway.
Nobody bashes me for that.
Lesbian and gay magazines in class.
Other kids take a peek.

Wearing pride colors.
I like those colors.
It's a part of who I am.

There is no formula,
or definition,
for what it means to be a lesbian.

We are like everyone else.
We are no different.
I'm just like other students.

I'm a girl who is nineteen.
I happen to be a lesbian.
I happen to be of a darker skin color.

When it comes down to it,
it just doesn't matter.

What really matters is what I have been through…

suicide
anorexia
depression
family problems
relationship issues
self-discovery

This is what makes me different.
Not my sexual orientation.

Safe In My Heart

I was feeling doubt.
I was worried.
I wasn't out to my parents.

I had no support.
I had no understanding.

You can be your worst enemy.
You can be your worst critic.

You are the one who can take your own life.
I almost did three or four times.

I have control over my life.

I can be comfortable within myself whether I'm gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

If I'm not comfortable,
I will never feel **safe in my heart.**

If I'm not comfortable with who I am,
I will have trouble everywhere else.
I will be scared.

It's a fact that I'm a lesbian.
I've faced it.
I was created like this.
I know that in my heart,
I don't have to prove myself to anyone.

I don't know what it feels like to be straight.
I don't know what it feels like to be a gay man.
I only know what it feels like to be a lesbian.

I like what I have right now.

I feel a lot of independence.
I don't have to fit into a stereotype of what a female should be.
I don't have to look like Barbie to be liked.
I don't feel the pressure to compete.

I feel stronger.
I have more self-confidence.
I'm out.
I'm not ashamed of who I am.

I feel safe in my heart.

Intertext II – Sexual Orientation and the Discourse of Silence

In the cause of silence, each one of us draws the face of [his or] her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all I think we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live… In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine [his or] her function in that transformation and to recognize [his or] her role as vital within that transformation
(Lorde, 1984, p. 42-43).

What are the costs of educational, cultural, and political discourses that sanction silences and institutionalize invisibility for Queer young adults in their schools and communities? Richard Friend (1993 & 1998) suggests that, for many Queer young adults, the possible outcomes of this heteronormativity include (1) dropping out of school or running away from home; (2) turning to drugs and/or alcohol as coping mechanisms; (3) developing low self-esteem; and (4) attempting or completing suicide.

Many formal and non-formal educational institutions reproduce and maintain a culture of fear and hatred (McLaren, 1995) towards Queer persons that contributes to the polarization of heterosexual and homosexual students and teachers as opposite ends of a binary. Constructing Queer students and teachers as the "Other" reinforces and regulates a heteronormative status quo in which power, privilege, and status are accorded to those who are perceived as "normal". Through the maintenance and regulation of this hegemonic discourse, Queer students and Queer teachers are constructed as sex-and-gender OUTlaws who attempt to survive (and in some cases thrive) within these regulatory regimes of power (Tierney, 1997).

Friend (1998) asks us to ask ourselves if we really know and comprehend what life is like for many of the Queer young adults in our schools, classrooms, and communities. He suggests that if we don't know what life is like for Queer young

adults, or if we are surprised when someone raises this question, then the ignorance and surprise tells us a great deal about what life is like for them.

Friend's (1998) research suggests that many Queer young adults are developing coping strategies that are needed to survive in heteronormative and homophobic school environments. These strategies include attempting to pass as straight and learning to compartmentalize identities by revealing only parts of true selves in schools, classrooms, and communities. Some Queer students may engage in homophobic name calling and bullying to cast suspicion away and to cover their same-sex feelings and desires. And, others may try to overcompensate by participating in a form of heterosexual immersion that can lead to heterosexual promiscuity, and in some cases pregnancy, as a way to cast the Queer gaze away from their thoughts and feelings. Still other Queer students become overachievers in an attempt to win acceptance from themselves and others. Yet, others drop out from school as an active statement of resistance to the heteronormative status quo in which they are rendered silent and invisible (p. 153-155).

It is important to emphasize that the stress associated with the social stigmatization of being (or being perceived as) Queer can invite verbal abuse, emotional violence, and personal danger. In other words, these students often live in a hostile and uninviting school and community environment. It is this culture of homophobia and heterosexism that are the problem, **not** the Queer young adults. Thus it is important that all educators are aware of the safety issues and health concerns that many Queer and questioning young adults confront in their daily lives. This begins by educators educating themselves. Here are some important facts and resources to begin.

School-Related Problems in Canada

In a 1999 British Columbia report the McCreary Center Society found that:

- Eighty-two percent of gay and lesbian students have 'sometimes' or 'often' heard homophobic remarks made by other students at school.
- Thirty-seven percent of gay and lesbian youth questioned feel like outsiders at school.
- Almost 40% of gay and lesbian youth surveyed have dramatically low self-esteem.
- Thirty-nine percent of participants told a teacher or school counselor that they are gay or lesbian.
- Twenty-two percent of LGBT youth never or rarely feel safe at school.

In the past year at school…

- Sixty-three percent of LGBT youth surveyed reported being verbally abused
- Thirty-four percent of LGBT youth surveyed report being threatened with violence
- Seventeen percent of LGBT youth surveyed reported being physically assaulted

Suicide

- "Canada has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world… of all teens who commit suicide, about one third appear to be homosexual in orientation" (Kroll & Warneke, 1995).
- Gay male and bisexual youth, in Alberta, are 14 times more at risk for a serious suicide attempt than heterosexual male youth (Bagley & Tremblay, 1997).
- Lesbian and gay persons who did **not** attempt suicide differed in two ways from those who did attempt:
  - they experienced less stress in coming out to their parents/family
  - they experienced less ridicule for their sexual orientation

  (Ryan & Futterman, 1998).

Homelessness

- Between 20% - 40% of homeless youth are LGBT. These rates are probably under-reported since many LGBT youth are unlikely to reveal their sexual identity/orientation to authorities. Many LGBT youth are forced out of their homes and onto the streets when they disclose their sexual orientation to their families (Ryan & Futterman, 1998).

Violence & Physical Safety

- One in five gay and lesbian youth have been physically assaulted in the past year (McCreary Center, 1999).

- A 1999 Safe Schools Coalition study of Seattle public schools found LGBT youth were **5 times** more likely than their heterosexual peers to be targets of violence and/or harassment, almost **3 times** more likely to be injured in a fight severely enough to need medical attention, and nearly **2 times** as likely to be threatened or injured by someone with a weapon. Since the study's inception in 1993, **7** young people have reported being gang raped in public schools because of their sexual orientation (Reis, 1999).

Substance Use & Abuse

- "[LGBT] youth often internalize society's negative messages regarding sexual orientation, many suffer from self-hatred as well as social and emotional isolation. Substance abuse can be motivated by [LGBT] youth's attempts to manage stigma and shame, to deny same sex feelings, or as a defense against ridicule and anti-gay violence" (Ryan & Futterman, 1998).

LGBT Youth of Colour Face Additional Challenges

"We are not only lesbian, gay,[bisexual, and transgender]. We are also white, black, Latino, [Aboriginal], sons, daughters, brothers, [sisters], students, and friends. [Educators] need to understand that we are more than our sexual identity (- Juan, age 19 as cited in Ryan & Futterman, 1998, p. 7).

- "Unlike racial stereotypes that are positively re-framed by the family and ethnic community, negative cultural perceptions of homosexuality are [often] reinforced" for LGBT youth of color. As within mainstream culture, homophobia within ethnic minority communities is high (Advocates for Youth, 2002; Ryan & Futterman, 1998, p. 14).

- Many LGBT youth in modern Aboriginal communities face humiliation and violence because of their sexual orientation, even though past traditions often affirmed and valued them as LGBT persons. Numerous LGBT Aboriginal organizations are working to reclaim the value previously placed on Two-Spirited identities (Advocates for Youth, 2002; Roscoe, 1988; Day, 1995).

- Many Asian-Canadian LGBT individuals often differ from cultural expectations of marriage and children. When LGBT individuals do not fulfill those expectations a sense of shame is often brought to the individual and the family name (Advocates for Youth, 2002; Kumashiro, 2001; Wade, Watt, & Mo, 1991).

- African-Canadian LGBT youth often face additional pressure because of discrimination from the larger society, including white gay communities and homophobic Black communities (Advocates for Youth, 2002; Pittman, Wilson, & Adams-Taylor, 1992). To maintain acceptance in their Black communities many youth feel that they have to down play their homosexuality, and to fit into the LGBT community many feel that they have to downplay their Blackness (Sears, 1995).

Queer students often compensate by becoming…

- Perfectionistic 'A' students
- Scholarship winners
- Doctors, lawyers, professors, artists, musicians
- High performance athletes

Queer young adults often have grown up with feelings that being a Queer person is wrong or bad, and in turn, have learned that they must hide their identity.

As a result, they often try to be perfect in everything else that they do to cover up what society deems to be an imperfection.

Perhaps, as Gregory Herek (1993), a research psychologist suggests, we need to adjust our view of LGBT youth to one of gifted children who by virtue of their extraordinarily powerful and creative resilience survive adolescence and make their way into the world of adulthood. Maybe one day we will think of Queer students not as *at-risk youth* or as *overachievers*, but simply as ordinary youth who accept life's challenges on a daily basis.

In 2000, the Surrey Teachers' Association (STA) of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation issued a resource guide entitled *"Moving beyond silence: addressing homophobia in elementary schools"*. This resource guide identifies schools as one of "the last bastions of tolerated hatred towards glbt people" (STA, 2000, p. 2). The document asks educators why they are so fearful of addressing issues related to sex-and-gender differences in their classrooms. The common elements to educator's fears include: "1. Lack of knowledge about glbt people and same-gender families. 2. Worries that discussing glbt relationships means talking about 'gay sex' at school. 3. Fear of parent reactions. 4. Worries about administrative concern and lack of support. 5. Religious and/or moral objections of parents and the community at large" (STA, 2000, p. 3).

ATA Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Educational Website

In 2002, the Alberta Teachers' Association's Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee developed an educational website (Wells, 2002b) to help teachers work through the fears and concerns that they have in addressing LGBT issues in their educational environments. This educational website features:

- Frequently asked questions
- Suggestions and guidelines to address homophobia and heterosexism in school, classroom, and community environments
- Community educational notices and events
- Research articles, background papers, and teacher narratives
- Provincial, national, and international resource listings
- Health and safety concerns for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth
- LGBT educational resource listings
- Research Tools

These resources are available online:
http://www.teachers.ab.ca/diversity/Sexual_Orientation/Index.htm

Suggestions for creating safe, caring, and inclusive educational environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students and teachers in Alberta schools[7]

In keeping with law and educational policy, administrators, teachers, counselors, students, and district level personnel have legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities to ensure that all students, including LGBT students, are provided with safe, caring, and inclusive learning environments that respect and affirm their individual identities and experiences.

A suggested process

Create and specify clear policies and rules of conduct that expressly protect students and teachers on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual

[7] Adapted from the California Department of Education's (1997) publication: "Hate-motivated behavior in schools: Response strategies for school boards, administrators, law enforcement, and communities".

orientation[8] and/or gender identity[9]. These policies should include specific language that explicitly prohibits homophobic[10] language and behaviour. Specify these policies and codes of conduct in documents, speeches, and orientation sessions that are held with students and school and district level personnel. Include mention of the activities that are considered to violate these policies and constitute unacceptable behaviour (i.e. using the words fag, Queer, or gay in a negative and demeaning way). Outline the procedures for reporting inappropriate behaviour and the consequences for those who commit homophobic verbal, physical, or emotional assaults.

Assess the existing school climate by performing a school climate survey[11] with regards to LGBT issues. Use the information gathered from these assessment tools to develop strategies to help reduce homophobic and heterosexist[12] behaviors within your school environment.

Adapt curriculum by using educational materials that enhance the visibility and understanding of different cultural, ethnic, and sexual minorities. Use teachable moments, as they arise, to discuss stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice towards visible and invisible (i.e. LGBT) minorities.

Provide staff training to give educators the knowledge and skills to respond immediately and appropriately to homophobic language and behaviour. Training

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[8] Sexual orientation is defined as "the fact of being [emotionally and physically] attracted to people of the opposite sex, of one's own sex, or both sexes" (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2000, p. 949).
[9] Gender identity is defined as one's "personal sense of being male or female" (Ryan & Futterman, 1998, p. 9).
[10] Homophobia/homophobic behaviour can be defined as the "irrational prejudice, fear, hatred, or negative attitudes towards homosexuals or homosexuality" (Ryan & Futterman, 1998, p. 12).
[11] For more information on assessing school climates with regard to LGBT issues visit the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) website <www.glsen.org> and/or obtain a copy of GLSEN's booklet, "A Developmental Model for Assessing, Describing and Improving Schools for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People (2001).
[12] Heterosexism – "Denial, denigration and stigmatization of non-heterosexual identity, behaviour, relationships or community; often expressed in subtler forms than homophobia (i.e. absence of support and neglect rather than overt prejudice)" (Ryan & Futterman, 1998, p. 12).

should model age appropriate ways to intervene in harassment and ought to clearly outline how to accurately report and address homophobic incidents in ways that provide appropriate assistance to the victim and the offender.

Provide workshops and information sessions for school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members that teach the importance of using inclusive language and the value of setting positive examples that affirm and embrace differing sexual orientations and gender identities within the home and community. Safe, caring, and inclusive environments that are designed to embrace, affirm, and protect *all* students and *all* teachers are the responsibility of everyone.

Involve community partners, such as local LGBT youth and community agencies, school resource officers, and health care professionals as important educational resources. These community partnerships serve as valuable resources in helping to develop knowledgeable, respectful, and inclusive school climates in which diversity and difference are affirmed.

Support student human rights groups and peer education projects that promote appreciation and respect for LGBT persons. Become a faculty advisor for the creation of a Gay/Straight Student Alliance[13] (GSA) in your school. Celebrate National Coming Out Day on October 11th. Organize information bulletin boards and/or displays that raise the visibility and awareness of LGBT students and their issues. Network with existing student groups and programs to include the voices and experiences of LGBT youth.

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[13] For more information on GSA's visit the Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia's (GALE-BC) website <www.galebc.org>.

Important Policies and legislation

The *ATA Professional Code of Conduct*, the *Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers*, the *Alberta School Act*, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and the *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* all serve as important policies and legislation that reflect the need for Alberta teachers to teach in a manner that is inclusive and respectful of students and teachers sexual orientations. These documents serve as important guidelines that reflect the legal, professional, and ethical responsibilities of teachers to create safe, caring, and inclusive school environments for LGBT students and staff.

The ATA Professional Code of Conduct, Item 1

http://www.teachers.ab.ca/professional/code.html

"The teacher teaches in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, religious belief, color, sex, ***sexual orientation****, physical characteristics, age, ancestry or place of origin."*

The Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers, Item 9

http://www.teachers.ab.ca/about/declaration.html

"Teachers have the right to be protected against discrimination on the basis of prejudice as to race, religious belief, color, sex, ***sexual orientation****, physical characteristics, age, ancestry, or place of origin and have the responsibility to refrain from practising these forms of discrimination in their professional duties."*

The Alberta School Act, Section 28(7)

http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca/documents/acts/SO3.cfm

"A board shall ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board is provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviors."

Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms, Section 15(1)

http://lois.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/

"*Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability*".

Although Section 15(1) of the *Charter* does not explicitly make reference to sexual orientation in its equality provisions, it has been regarded by the Courts as analogous to the other personal characteristics listed. The inclusion and the accommodation of all differences are the parameters of Section 15.

Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act

http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca/Documents/acts/H14.CFM

Although not expressly stated in the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*, (HRMCA), sexual orientation is "read in" to the *HRCMA* as a protected ground of discrimination in Alberta. This is due to the Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Vriend*, which declared Alberta's human rights legislation unconstitutional (Vriend v. Alberta, 1998). Discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited in areas including publications (s. 3); goods, services, accommodation or facilities customarily available to the public (s. 4); employment (s. 7); or employment applications or advertisements (s. 8). While s. 11 of the *HRCMA*, provides that there is no contravention of the Act if the conduct was reasonable or justifiable in the circumstances, where the inherent dignity of all persons in the context of public education is at issue, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation should not be viewed as justifiable.

In the context of education, courts have held that publicly funded schools, school boards and the actions and/or non-actions of school officials are subject to *Charter* scrutiny. As a result, *all* students and teachers have the right not to be discriminated against in school settings; for LGBT persons this right is often violated. The most common forms of discrimination are verbal and physical harassment. However, even in schools where attempts are made to minimize verbal and physical harassment, LGBT youth still frequently experience the "oppression of silence". This silence may come in the form of avoiding discussions of LGBT issues or in the absence of positive information or images of LGBT people.

Teachers, administrators, and school boards have a mandated professional responsibility to ensure that LGBT students and teachers are treated with respect and integrity within their classroom and school communities.

Related Comments from the Supreme Court of Canada
http://www.scc-csc.gc.ca/

Ross v. New Brunswick School District No. 15 (1995):

> The importance of ensuring an equal and discrimination free educational environment, and the perception of fairness and tolerance in the classroom are paramount in the education of young children. This helps foster self-respect and acceptance by others (Ross v. New Brunswick School District No. 15 [1996], 1 S.C.R. 825).

Trinity Western University v. BCCT (2001):

> Without the existence of supportive classroom environments, homosexual and bisexual students will be forced to remain invisible and reluctant to approach their teachers. They will be victims of identity erasure, forced into … a spiral of silence in which lesbians and gays modify their behaviour to avoid the impact of prejudice (Trinity Western University v. British Columbia College of Teachers [2001], 1 S.C.R. 772).

Chamberlain V. Surrey School District No. 36 (2002):

> The demand for tolerance cannot be interpreted as the demand to approve of another person's beliefs or practices. When we ask people to be

> tolerant of others, we do not ask them to abandon their personal convictions. We merely ask them to respect the rights, values and ways of being of those who may not share those convictions. The belief that others are entitled to equal respect depends, not on the belief that their values are right, but on the belief that they have a claim to equal respect regardless of whether they are right. Learning about tolerance is therefore learning that other people's entitlement to respect from us does not depend on whether their views accord with our own. Children cannot learn this unless they are exposed to views that differ from those they are taught at home.... Tolerance is always age appropriate (Chamberlain v. Surrey School Board [2002], 1. S.C.C. 86).

What can one teacher do?[14]

(1) Develop knowledge and awareness.

- Examine your own attitudes and beliefs about sexuality and consider your own biases (low risk[15]).
- Learn about LGBT issues, culture, and current issues by reading books and journals, and by watching LGBT themed videos and films (low risk).

(2) Examine the language that you use.

- Assume there are LGBT students in all of your classes and consider if the language that you use on a daily basis reflects that reality.
- Remember, research indicates that 1 in 10 of your students are non-heterosexual (low risk).
- Use the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender as part of your regular classroom vocabulary (low risk).
- Use inclusive language that allows for LGBT possibilities. For example, use the word partner instead of girlfriend or boyfriend (low risk).

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[14] Adapted from Schneider (1997) & Lipkin (1999).

[15] Lipkin (1999) identifies three levels of risk (low, some, and greater) in his discussion of LGBT educational initiatives and school change.

(3) Take a close look at your classroom.

- Consider the posters or images on your walls and the materials on your bookshelves. Are there opportunities for you to display to students that you value diversity, including diversity concerning sexual orientation and gender identity? If posters become defaced or removed, put up new ones and consider this an opportunity to engage students in a discussion about intolerance and discrimination (some risk).

(4) Challenge homophobic jokes or remarks.

- Make an effort to create an atmosphere in your classroom where students can talk about the impact of discrimination that they have faced. Draw parallels between sexism, racism, and homophobia, and talk about oppression in all its forms. Take the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and binary thinking. Try to correct false assumptions and misinformation about LGBT persons and other marginalized groups (some risk).

(5) Develop inclusive material.

- Consider whether you are able to include a unit related to LGBT educational issues in a course that you teach. Identify knowledge, skill, and attitude outcomes in your subject area that address LGBT issues. Provide for inclusive education in everyday lessons that honour and respect diversity and difference (greater risk).
- Invite LGBT speakers into your classroom (greater risk).
- Provide resources in your school library and on bulletin boards or displays (some risk).

- Sponsor a "diversity day" in your school to discuss gender, race, ethnicity, ability, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity issues (some risk).

(6) *Advocate directly for LGBT persons.*

- Speak up for LGBT and non-LGBT youth who are targeted or harassed (greater risk).
- Volunteer to provide staff facilitation to form a gay/straight alliance and or support group for LGBT and questioning youth (greater risk).
- Educate other staff members about the needs of LGBT students (greater risk).
- Encourage your school to provide professional development workshops for teachers and parents on LGBT health, safety, and educational issues (greater risk).

(7) *Develop a support network.*

- Develop a broad base of support among students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other school personnel. Find people who can help you locate and access school and community based LGBT information and resources (greater risk).
- Find people to whom you can turn to for personal and emotional support (greater risk).

(8) *If you are a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender teacher, consider coming out.*

- If you are heterosexual, come out in support of LGBT persons (some risk).
- If you are an LGBT teacher, consider the risks and realities of coming out to your staff and/or students. Coming out can have a positive impact on

student and teacher attitudes towards homosexuality and homophobia (greater risk).

- LGBT teachers should not be required to "stand on their own". With the support of administrators and colleagues, the decision of a teacher to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity can be an extremely powerful message, as students of all sexual orientations can learn that their sexuality is not something to hide in shame.

Chapter Three

Found Poetry as a Poststructural Practice of Inquiry

"Poetry is ... a practical *and* powerful *method for analyzing social worlds"*
(Richardson, 1998, p. 357).

"A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of philosopher: the text he [or she] writes, the work he [or she] produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work or art itself is looking for"
(Lyotard, 1979/1984 as quoted in St. Pierre, 1997, p. 380).

Poetry is not a luxury[16]

Through poetry we give name
To the nameless and the formless
To the about to be birthed
but already felt

HOPE

Poetry is…
The power within our living
To overcome the fear which rules our lives
and the silences that control

We have grown strong through the darkness

Dark, ancient, deep
Hidden sources of power
Contain true knowledge and
Lasting action

NO

Poetry is not a luxury

It forms and shapes the quality of our light
Our dreams and hopes for survival and change
are no longer nameless

[16] Found poem created in response and reflection to Audre Lorde's 1984 essay "Poetry is not a luxury".

They are created from the rock experiences of our daily lives

Our ideas are sanctuaries of light
They are our dreams and poems
The architecture of our lives
They are the bridge across our fears

Poetry is revolution
Poetry is light
Poetry is the language buried within all of us

We cannot dream unless we believe

Courage and encourage
ourselves and others
to find their own light

We have survived

Our dreams point the way to freedom
They give us strength
To see
To feel
To speak
To go into the light
and LIVE

NO
Poetry is not a luxury

It is within each of us
Buried deep

Waiting…

For
The Fear
To End
And The
Light
To
Begin

Introduction

This chapter explores how I use found poetry as a poststructural practice of inquiry which, through conscious and deliberative attention works to develop a more explicit and interpretive text that (1) attempts to make the research participants' voices and experiences a major focal point, (2) exposes the limited and partial nature of knowledge claims that can be made by the researcher, and (3) highlights the importance of taking into account the locatedness and interpretative demands placed on the reader (Kumashiro, 1999). This chapter highlights the importance of developing a multi-layered dialogic encounter between the author, research participants, reader, and the text with the intent of encouraging a deeper and more meaningfully reflexive engagement.

Writing poststructural ethnography

Postmodernism as a discourse and theoretical practice critiques the promise of capitalism, and the erosion of high culture, where as poststructuralism encompasses a critical perspective that scrutinizes positivism and humanism and its subsequent effects on the production of discourses and discursive practices (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 506-507). Both postmodernism and poststructuralism are highly contested postfoundational terms that provide for the necessary ambiguity and unintelligibility needed to resist their academic colonization and domestication (Butler, 1993).

Poststructural critiques attempt to question, contest, deconstruct, and open up hegemonic humanistic discourses (patriarchy, racism, homophobia, etc.) to other realities and possibilities (St. Pierre, 2000). For example, as I have outlined

in an earlier chapter, Queer theory provides a troubling critique of humanism (in particular heteronormativity) and its construction and maintenance of the hetero/homosexual and male/female binaries. Poststructuralists believe that we are always living and operating in the intersection of identity categories. This intersection refuses to allow identities to be grouped or subsumed under all encompassing categories in which identities can be "manipulated, dismissed, and oppressed" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 480).

Britzman (2000) further elaborates by extending poststructural critiques to ethnography when she states that a critical poststructural ethnographic practice should "begin with assumptions of historicity and define ethnography as both a set of practices and a set of discourses" (p. 28). Britzman also suggests that ethnography can only contain partial truths and fictions as the "authority of the ethnography, the ethnographer, and the reader is always suspect" (p. 28).

For poststructural researchers authorship, identity, and representation are always in crisis. As a result, poststructuralists use language and deconstruction to make visible how humanism and other meta-narratives operate to "produce very real, material, and damaging structures in the world" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481). Poststructuralism is less concerned with essentialized meanings, questions, or understandings, but, rather, seeks to investigate and deconstruct how discourses are produced, regulated, and maintained (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). From a poststructural perspective the researcher is asked to look differently or, as Zizek (1991) suggests, "to look awry" (p. 3) at discourses in an effort to question, contest, challenge and refashion their limits of intelligibility and possibility

(Britzman, 2000). Britzman (2000) elaborates further on the demand for textual and theoretical coherence. "Poststructuralist theories disrupt any desire for a seamless narrative, a cohesive identity, or a mimetic representation. Poststructuralism disturbs the ethnographer's confidence in 'knowing' experience" (p. 32).

Poststructuralists believe that "we can never escape the webs of power relations and the girds of regularity produced by discourse and cultural practices. [Thus] we are obliged to give up on the Enlightenment promise of an innocent knowledge, one that will lead us to the Truth that will set us free" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 499). Instead of the quest for an absolute truth Richardson (1994) suggests that "having a partial, local, [and] historical knowledge is still knowing" (p. 518).

This partial and situated knowledge leads an epistemologically reflective researcher to ground his or her theoretical framework(s) within the everyday cultural practices and realities of their research participants (Foley, 2002). This locally situated knowledge is an attempt to replace abstract theorizing with a more abductive way of knowing, doing, and presenting research. This abductive research process constantly moves back and forth, in and out, and between a concrete and tangible sense of the research field experience and a theoretical interpretive analysis (Foley, 2002). The promise of abductive research is fulfilled by holding two distinct ways of knowing in a dynamic tension that "utilizes both a scientific and more artistic way of knowing" (Foley, 2002, p. 477) and presenting research.

This necessary tension strives to develop a transparency that uncovers how the researcher and their theoretical frameworks and inherent biases can attempt to make any claims of truth or fact arising from the research process. The demand for reflection and transparency in the abductive research process requires the researcher to historicize his or her research and provide for a disciplinary context that accounts for the shape and form of their analysis. Moreover, it requires the researcher to develop a disciplined and systematic approach to theory development that is situated "within and against the discursive traditions of a discipline(s)" (Foley, 2002, p. 477). As Foley (2002) highlights, this abductive process creates a type of research map that is

> always approximate and subject to reformulation and debate within the field of production… Yet no matter how provisional a construct or explanation might be, it functions as a lens or heuristic devise which maps cultural practices and spaces much like cartographers map physical space (p. 477).

Patti Lather (2000) suggests that we use and construct our research maps to "get lost" and "get in the way" of the discourses and theoretical perspectives that would serve to traditionally mark and constrain our research efforts. Lather suggests that we transfer the burden and responsibility of interpretation to the reader in an effort to develop a postmodern dialogic encounter that creates a blurry and messy text that highlights the tensions evident in our research efforts to provoke a deep and more engaged reading. Patti Lather's (2000) comments concur with Deborah Britzman's (2000) call for critical poststructural reading practices that

> require something more of readers. Readers of ethnography must also be willing to construct more complicated reading practices that move beyond

> the myth of literal representations and the deceptive promise that "the real" is transparent, stable and just like the representational (p. 39).

Evaluating poststructural ethnography

Richardson (2000) suggests that the postmodern turn has awakened researchers to the "problematics of collection and reporting 'data' and challenges disciplinary rules and boundaries on ethical, aesthetic, theoretical, and empirical grounds" (p. 253). As a result, this *new* form of ethnography is viewed as both increasingly scientific and literary, as it demands that researchers become "more self-conscious about claims to authorship, authority, truth, validity and reliability" (p. 253-254). Cognizant of these new criteria Richardson (2000) suggests that postmodern and poststructural ethnography should be evaluated using two distinct lenses: art and science (p. 253).

Richardson (2000) suggests that when using these two lenses postmodern ethnographic research should be held to high and rigorous standards. In developing these standards Richardson (2000) identifies five distinct criteria that she uses when evaluating ethnographic research: (1) "Substantive contribution" (How does this writing and research make a significant contribution to our understanding of social relationships?) (2) "Aesthetic merit" (What aesthetic value does the text hold? Does the text "open up" and encourage "interpretive responses"?) (3) Reflexivity (How has the author's subjectivity and reflexivity influenced and/or been included in the text? How does the author hold themselves accountable to their research participants and reader(s)? What ethical issues did the author experience?) (4) "Impact" (Does the text affect the reader's emotions and intellect? How does the text raise new questions within the reader? How does

the text encourage the reader to try new research practices or take action?) (5) "Expresses a reality" (Does the text embody and convey a sense of lived experience? Does the text present a realistic and "credible account" of the social, cultural, and individual lived and learned experiences of the research participants?) (p. 254).

We are living and writing in postmodern times in which no discourse, method, or theory can have a privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism opens up our methods of knowing to critique and reflective analysis in which the "situational limitations of the knower … recognizes that [we can only] have partial, local, temporal knowledge – and that is enough" (Richardson, 2001, p. 35). These evaluation criteria can begin to assist researchers in constructing texts that meet the postmodern challenge to use "writing as a method of discovery, a way of finding out about yourself and your world" (Richardson, 2001, p. 35).

Found poetry as a critical poststructural ethnographic practice

From a poststructural perspective I use found poetry as a way to engage the discomfort that is lodged uncomfortably in between the "spaces, gaps, and injustices" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 4) evident in modernist research paradigms. The found poetry produced in this research project attempts to create a counter hegemonic discourse that strives to rub up against the grand narratives of education, culture, and schooling that celebrate and maintain the heteronormative status quo. These narratives seek to struggle to "reclaim and rewrite untold histories, to subvert what counts as knowledge and truth, and to challenge those

who claim to have the authority to speak for them" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 5).

In this research investigation, I have used found poetry, narrative vignettes, and visual narrative constructions to heed St. Pierre and Pillow's (2000) call to develop qualitative research, representations, and figurations not as

> graceful metaphors that provide coherency and unity to contradiction and disjunction, but rather [as] cartographic weapons, "splitting analytics" (McCoy, 1997), that propel them into turbulence masked by coherence … [these] figurations [are used] as practices of failure, tools of "rigorous confusion that jettison clarity in favor of the unintelligible" (St. Pierre, 1997b, p. 281) in an effort to move toward different realities (p. 14-15).

In this dissertation I position found poetry as a conceptual research tool to examine and map the ways in which Queer young adults navigate, resist, and make use of the available discourses that surround them to construct and challenge representations of their everyday realities within formal and non-formal learning environments.

Traditional research categories and representations often fail "when figurations are employed, but their ruins become fruitful sites for thinking" (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000, p. 15) about subjectivity, voice, agency, and representation in qualitative research. The use of figurations like visual narratives and found poetry represents a critical practice of ethnography in a postfoundational world. It employs broader narrative strategies in an effort to create texts that are designed to transgress modernist empirical norms (St. Pierre, 1997a; Tierney, 2002). As Van Maanen (1995) states

> with no fixed, natural, objective, or universal criteria to guide ethnography up to the mountain top, there is no alternative but to get down to the specific studies that make up the field(s) and acknowledge that

> ethnographic values, criteria, and perspectives spring from the specific interests and histories of ethnographic writers (as quoted in St. Pierre, 1997b, p. 370).

Why Found Poetry?

Richardson (2000) suggests that we can expand the field of social science research by asking ourselves a series of interrelated questions:

> (a) how does the way we are suppose to write-up our findings become an unexamined trope in our claims to authoritative knowledge, (b) what might we learn about our "data" if we stage it in different writing formats, and (c) what other audiences might we be able to reach if we step outside the conventions of social scientific writing (p. 157)?

By creating a different textual form I am attempting to move towards the unknowable, unimaginable, and at times unbearable spaces within my research. Found poetry uses evocative writing that "touches us where we live, in our bodies… [as] we find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, [and] blurred experiences … [as] we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties" (Richardson, 1998, p. 355). Found poetry "nudges" us into an awareness that the text we are reading has been constructed. Of course, " all texts are constructed – prose ones, too; therefore, poetry helps problematize reliability, validity, and truth" (Richardson, 1998, p. 356). Richardson (1998) further suggests that by "writing up interviews as poems [we] honor the speaker's pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies, rhythms, and so on. Poetry may actually better represent the speaker than the practice of quoting snippets in prose" (p. 356).

Witherall & Noddings (1991) in speaking on the importance of using different forms of representation and research state that stories, like poetry, can be

> cathartic and liberating. But it is more than that. Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated in samples, treatments and faceless subjects. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And, of course, they remind us of our present fallibility. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition (as quoted in Dhunpath, 2000, p. 547).

While narrative representations like found poetry may offer a unique way to re-present a research participant's experiences Butler-Kisber (2000) cautions us that form and function need to be carefully considered when using poetic transcription, as not all data can nor should be represented as found poetry. However, when used appropriately the poetic representation of research data can become a personal, political, and pedagogical process (Grace & Benson, 2000; Richardson, 2001).

Representing text in poetic form requires the author to engage in difficult and intensely personal emotional work that insists on the writer living inside and alongside the body of the research participant. In order to accomplish this necessary task we need to be willing to give up the power, privilege, and objective distance that is often inherent in our position as the researcher and become more open to exploring and sharing our own sense of vulnerability. Carolyn Ellis (2002) suggests that by expressing our "feelings vulnerably on the page [we] invite others to express how they feel, comparing their experiences to [our own]" and to our research participants (p. 401).

The found poems created in this research text took more than two years to complete. There were many times when I could not bear to revisit and work with

the research participant's narratives. Their stories of isolation, hurt, pain, anger, and frustration brought me back to my own memories of living as a Queer young adult when the razor blade was only one cut away from ending the dull and constant pain that I held inside. When I constructed Jordana's found poem, *The scars remind me*, I was not only reliving her pain, but my own as well. When she states that "the scars remind me of all the hard days that I had to go through", I think back to my own school experiences and I wonder how many other Queer people carry with them the physical and emotional scars that map the terrain of their constructed silence and institutionalized invisibility.

Representing text in poetic form is also a political act as our choice of representation is used to deliberately challenge and deconstruct dominant ways of knowing, theorizing, and presenting research. The very act of poetic representation questions who has voice and authority in our research texts. It troubles the notion of representation and problematizes modernist conceptions of validity, reliability, reflexivity, and truth (Richardson, 2000). Poetic representation creates its own "truth" through the sharing of the lived and learned experiences of both the researcher and the researched in the construction of the text.

As a political act certain elements of the found poems in this research text represent stolen moments of hope and possibility in which Kevin, Jordana, Alex, and Jamie each describe how they have developed a sense of pride and self-knowledge that evolved through their struggles to come out and come to terms with their fugitive sex-and-gender identities. For example, in Jamie's found poem,

Normal is boring, she acknowledges her struggles and her subsequent sense of pride that developed when she states that

> for any out gay and lesbian person simply existing is a courageous act. It's that one element of pride. It's the one thing that I will always hold onto. I will fight to the bitter end for that rainbow flag.

As a pedagogical act, poetic representation serves as a poststructural feminist methodology that demonstrates how the political, personal, aesthetic, and emotional are inextricably connected to the people we write about in our research. In our texts, knowledge is not appropriated or controlled, but rather it is shared as the researcher strives to create a collaborative voice that emerges from the research process (Richardson, 2000). By engaging in this relational research ethic we emphasize the primacy of lived experience and encourage our readers to respond with their emotions and bodies as they attempt to understand and make sense of the research from their own uniquely situated experience. Alex, in his found poem *Dreams* speaks to this pedagogical intent when he describes his desire to help others overcome discrimination:

> I've come to peace with myself. I know why I am here… to help people…. I want to be a teacher and change young minds so that we can have a better future…. I have dreams.

Creating found poetry

My poetic transcription process began with the coding of the field texts (interviews) that I had produced with each of the research participants. I organized the data into major and minor themes that served to reflect on different aspects of each of the researcher participant's life experiences (Glesne, 1997). Next, I began by using an intuitive and aesthetic process to carve the field texts

into fragments of words, phrases, and stanzas that highlighted the significant cultural and educational experiences of the four research participants. I worked with these words and phrases to craft the found poetry by using only the research participant's exact words to portray the essences and emotions of their storied lives. My goal was not only to make sense of our research conversations, but also to convey the emotions that our research conversations evoked within me.

Much like a photograph, I hope that these found poems will encourage the reader to come to know the research participants through very few words (Glesne, 1997). Each poetic transcription provides a snapshot, and it creates a type of album of memories that represents rich and complex aspects of the research participant's Queer life and experiences. By thinking about how I re-present the research field texts I am forced to think about the meanings, understandings, voices, and experiences that are present in this research endeavor (Coffee & Atkinson, 1996). Experimenting with traditional textual formats allows me to invite the reader into the text. It encourages the reader to closely attend to this writing with their thoughts, feelings, and self-reflection.

Poetic re-presentation provides a unique opportunity for the research to create a "third voice" that emerges from the collaborative research process (Glesne, 1997). This voice is neither distinctly the researchers, nor the research participants, but a unique combination of both. A "fourth voice" can also emerge when the reader explores the found poetry and adds their personal thoughts and reflections to the poetic transcriptions. In this polyphonic collaboration there is no separation of the observer and the observed. Together, the reader, researcher, and

research participants develop a new perspective on the issue under investigation. This reflective process can be described as a "blurring [of the] boundaries" between the researcher-researched hyphen that can help "to heal [the] wounds of scientific categorization and technological dehumanization. With its aesthetic sensibilities, experimental writing [such as found poetry] can introduce spirit, imagination, and hope" into the research process (Glesne, 1997, p. 210).

Responding to the found poems

Once I completed crafting the found poems, I sent them back to Kevin, Jamie, Alex, and Jordana as an important element in honouring our iterative inquiry process. I asked them to read the found poems for their immediate impressions (good or bad). I also asked them to review the found poems for reliability and validity. In this sense the iterative process served as a member check to ensure the accuracy of the poetic re-presentations. I reminded each of the research participants that they could choose to remove or change any of the found poems (or parts of them) that made them feel uncomfortable or mis-represented.

I waited nervously, in some cases up to a few weeks, for their responses. As I waited I pondered many questions. How would I use the found poems in my dissertation? I wanted to do more than just include them as an afterthought in the appendix. These found poems represented the very blood, heart, and soul of this research project. How could I possibly do justice to these incredible stories? How would they respond to the found poems? Jamie sent me the following email describing her reactions to the found poems:

> I have read over the found poetry you created from our conversations many times. I think what strikes me the most is how angry I was at the

> time.... I think you did a fantastic job at creating little snap shots of me, and in turn the experiences of many other queer youth.
>
> [The found poem] *Always on the outside* makes me feel quite sad even though I would have to agree that it is a fair representation. I am just now in a place where I am trying to not look at myself that way anymore. There is little empowerment to be found in taking the victim role. I think I have found refuge in the gay community but I still struggle with the feeling of being the outsider in the world at large. I guess in some ways I feel very resentful of that. I always thought a day would come where I wouldn't look at myself as being different (in a bad way), but I don't have very many days like that.
>
> I like that you highlighted the portals of empowerment I did have at my disposal such as the internet and Y.U.Y [Youth Understanding Youth]. These were both quintessential in my coming out process. The first line of [the found poem] *Youth Understanding Youth* that reads "words can't even describe" is a vast understatement. I did not know when I walked through those GLCCE [Gay, Lesbian, Community Center of Edmonton] doors 5 years ago how enormously my life was going to change. And even though I feel that I have surpassed the point of needing what [the] group really offers to youth, I still hold onto Y.U.Y. as a part of myself.
>
> There are so many pieces that you have here I could ramble on forever. I just want you to know that all of them affected me very deeply as I know that they [sic] are my words just as much as they are yours. You managed to very powerfully convey a lot of the pain, angst, and loneliness. And as much as I would love to say that wasn't part of being young and queer, I think for many, myself included, it is. Here's to hoping that your work manages to open minds and hearts somewhere along the way (personal communication, February 1, 2003, italics added).

"Minds and hearts somewhere along the way"... I'm deeply affected reading Jamie's email. This research project has been a long and very personal journey that has ultimately been as much about reclaiming a part of my own stolen youth as it has been about completing the requirements of my master's degree. I can only hope that these found poems have the same affect on others as they have had on both Jamie and I.

Concluding remarks

Our lives consist of multiple stories and multiple re-tellings. As poststructural qualitative researchers we search for methods, metaphors, and figurations that allow us to re-present the storied lives of our research participants. Different methods and different "mediums allow us to see and to say different things about those lives" (Glsene, 1997, p. 213). Poetic re-presentation represents one possible powerful telling of the researchers' and research participant's storied lives and experiences.

By using found poetry as a form of figuration I claim only a partial and situated interpretation and, as Kumashiro (1999) suggests, "I present a literary lens that forces the reader to acknowledge his or her own positionality and interpretive labors in understanding my participants' experiences" (p. 496). By incorporating found poetry in my dissertation I am consciously taking a distinctly poststructural approach to *Queer* the research text as a way to challenge and contest normalized reading practices that often do "violence to the words and lives of the [Queer] people being researched" (Kumashiro, 1999, p. 496).

Alex

Age 18

Who Am I?

Eighteen, Christian, Chinese, and gay.

My mom is in denial. She doesn't like it.
I can't really be gay at home.
My Godfather provides for our financial support.
He told my mom that if *"your son is gay, I will not support you"*.

I can't really be gay at home.
It's a cultural thing. It's like family honour.
If one person knows, then every person knows.
I've grown accustomed to hiding it.

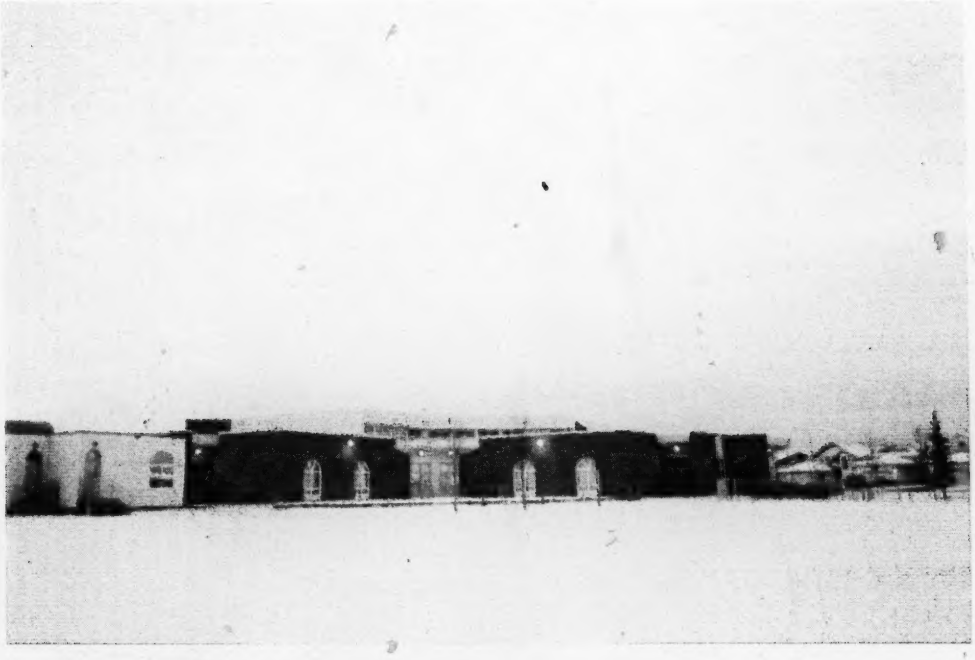
School In 3 Acts

Act one
I was the first person out at my school.

At my school you watch your back when you are leaving late.
If something happens to me then nobody else is going to ever come out.

I got called "faggot" a few times.

I didn't want to make a big deal out of it.
I thought that I was better than that.
I didn't need to be harassed by these people.
I just pushed it back and started getting used to it.
It soon becomes just a word.



Act two
I wanted people to believe me.
I even tried to look gay. It totally bombed on me.
I would walk weird with the arm thing and the wrists.
If you are going to be gay,
you have to be GAY.
It has to be big.
Just like on Queer As Folk.
You have to let it show.
Let everyone know right in that instant when you walk in the room.
GAY.

Straight people say to me
"you can't be gay,"
"you don't act gay,"
" you don't look gay,"
"you're not gay."

They come up with these conclusions.

I wanted people to believe me.
They didn't believe me until I was holding hands with another guy.

My objective is to let people know that I am normal.
I see the future as a place where everybody is equal and accepted.

Four other people have come out at that school since I did.

I was a role model.

Act three
One student decided to take advantage of me.
He asked me to do sexual stuff with him.
He threatened me.

We met over lunch.
I went to his place.
I did whatever he wanted me to do.

I went back to school.
I felt really bad.
Something was taken from me.

throwing books
depression
i ran out

I wanted to KILL myself.

I ended up in the office.

policemen
principal
counselor
mother
Godfather

They asked me all these questions…
over and over again.

I wasn't out to my mom.

I told them I made it all up.
I was scared.
I wasn't ready to say anything to my mom.

They kicked me out of school and put me into therapy.

People stayed away from me.

God Didn't Make You Gay

My pastor knows I'm gay.
He tells me that I should go and see a therapist to see where the roots of my homosexuality come from.
He told me to *"give it a try, even if you don't want to"*.

"God didn't make you gay," he says.

I've had therapy before – In grade nine.
The therapist said *"don't touch me, you might have AIDS or something"*.
They told me that I shouldn't cause problems in school.

"God didn't make you gay," he says.

I found out that if I went along with them it would get me out sooner.
I said whatever they wanted to hear.
The therapy lasted four weeks.

"God didn't make you gay," he says.

I don't think I need therapy.

Dreams

In Grade five or six I remember looking …
I couldn't find the word gay.

I got the Internet in grade seven.
I found a site for Queer youth.
I read the articles.
I found people who were in the same situation as me.
I wasn't alone.
That site was very important.
It helped me to feel comfortable with myself,
and showed me that it wasn't my own special situation.

I didn't get any support from my school.
It was all very heterosexual, even in health class.

For Queer youth the only place they can find information about themselves is on the Internet and most of those sites end up being porn sites.

Before the Internet I was really homophobic.
I hated myself.
I would always stay away from other Queer people.

I ended up in a deep depression.
I got into this sex addiction.
washrooms
parks
peep shows

Six months.
Over twenty people.

I didn't feel loved.
So I had sex with people.

I thought that even if it was just for a moment,
I was at least wanted by someone.

So I kept going to those places.

I thought that maybe it was because I was Chinese that I couldn't find anyone to love me. I thought I was ugly.

The more I did it,
the more I felt terrible for doing it,
and the more I felt unloved.
It was an endless cycle.

I looked at myself one day.
I had ended up in the middle of the park looking for sex.
That's when I went to get help.
I needed help before I got myself killed,
or got an STD or something.

I should go get help.
I have **dreams** to help people with my music.
I see the future as a place where everybody is equal and accepted.

I went to Youth Understanding Youth for the first time.
I started healing.
We had a session on self-esteem at a youth group retreat.
I realized that I wasn't the only one who thought like this.
I became more comfortable.
I went to gay pride week.

I've come to peace with myself.
I know why I am here…
To help people.

I feel like I've been called by God to help the gay community.
To help connect the two together.

I want to be a teacher and change young minds so that we can have a better future.

When I went back to school to pick up my yearbook.
One of the teachers saw my rainbow.

She said, *"good for you"*.
I have dreams.

Chapter Four

Visual Narrative Research

"A photograph is valuable both as an empirical, information document and as an expressive vehicle. The power of the image derives not only from its status as photographic evidence but from its powerful evocation of the emotions of life's struggles" (Struken & Cartwright, 2001).

"Issues of representation are important to anyone interested in the notion of power in research" (Holiday, 2000, p. 504).

Introduction

This chapter explores the use of photography as a qualitative research methodology that is designed to help develop a critical practice of viewing and a postmodern practice of reading and incorporating visual imagery in educational research. The first section of this chapter explores how photography has been theorized and adapted as a research method in the social sciences. The next section explores the practice of viewing, reading, and interpreting visual images using a critical postmodern and poststructural lens. Further, this chapter examines the research methodology that I used to encourage the research participants to become the image-makers of their own stories. These visual narratives provide for key insights into the everyday educational experiences of Queer young adults within their formal and non-formal learning communities. To conclude, this chapter describes a process to assist in the development of a critical practice of viewing and reading visual imagery. This process can serve to influence and create a Queer public pedagogy that challenges normalizing educational and cultural discourses.

Visualizing theory

The use of visual imagery in research has a long and storied history within the field of anthropology. Whether through the use of sketches, photographs, or film, anthropological research has traditionally used visual methods to enhance observation and documentation as a way to remove a researcher's bias and as a method to enhance scientific rigor and reliability (Holiday, 2000). In particular Mead & Bateson's book *Balinese Character* (1942) serves as a foundational model for traditional anthropologic visual analysis (Harper, 1988).

In contrast to this traditional documentary approach, the discipline of cultural studies has a significant history of academic critique that analyzes visual materials as a form of cultural production that can provide important insights into social lives and relationships of power, privilege, and class. For example, the works of Stuart Hall (1980) in Britain and Henry Giroux (1994) in the United States provide exemplary theoretical models that examine images and cultural texts as significant sources of social and cultural knowledge that greatly contribute to the transmission of hegemonic ideologies and the maintenance of the status quo.

Taking its lead from cultural studies, Queer theory has taken up the critical notion of textual and visual analysis as a site for contesting the regulation and production of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. This emphasis on textual analysis has recently come under critique as "a dangerous tendency for the new Queer theorists to ignore the 'real' queer life as it is materially

experienced across the world, while they play with free-floating signifiers of texts" (Stein and Plummer as quoted in Halberstam, 1998, p. 12).

Instead, a more appropriately "Queered" approach would incorporate a methodology that attempts to trouble disciplinary boundaries and grand narratives. A distinctly Queer methodology neither owes nor promises any allegiance to a particular epistemological, theoretical, or methodological framework. Rather as Halberstam (1998) argues, a Queer methodology is a

> ...scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion towards disciplinary coherence (p. 13).

Perhaps this Queer methodology should be more closely aligned with visual research methods and cultural studies since many Queer persons have an acute skill at reading visual cues and mainstream culture that stems from being branded as a part of an "outlaw" cultural group. This outlaw culture has historically relied on symbols, dress, gestures, and other non-verbal cues to communicate and make visible forbidden identities (Holiday, 2000). In many situations Queer research participants are sophisticated readers and participants of culture, politics, and education and, as such, have much to teach researchers about the approaches to and the processes of visual research design and interpretation (Holiday, 2000).

The practice of looking

All photographic images have denotative and connotative meaning(s) (Struken & Cartwright, 2001). The denotative meaning represents a photographic image's descriptive abilities. A photograph's connotative meaning relies upon the

cultural, historical, social, and political contexts embedded within the image and the photographer. Many of the images that we encounter in our day to day lives, whether they are on television, in magazines, or in school texts contain heterosexualized myths that contribute to a heteronormalizing discourse. This discourse positions heterosexuality as natural and normal, and Queerness as abnormal or deviant.

The practice of looking and reading is not a passive act. Reading a photograph or image involves a complex critical examination of the sets of relationships that are embedded within larger political, social, historical, and cultural discourses of power, privilege, and patriarchy. These hegemonic discourses often work to consciously and unconsciously assign a specific meaning and understanding to the images and texts that we view by focusing the viewer's gaze on the traditional binaries of good/evil, male/female, and hetero/homosexuality.

Postmodern photographic practices strive to produce images that disrupt and move beyond simple binary representations and glossy portrayals. These postmodern practices seek to investigate beneath the surface of photographs in an attempt to uncover the hidden structures and discourses that mask and mark surface appearances. Postmodern photographic practices are designed to be self-reflexive, fragmented, and complex commentaries located within a person's uniquely situated experience. The creation of photographic visual narratives attempts to move beyond the world of stock images, media hype, popular cultural dogma, cliché stereotypes, and grand narratives. These visual narratives should be

read at both conscious and unconscious levels, critiquing "our own memories, knowledge, and cultural frameworks as well as the image itself and the dominant meanings that cling to it" (Struken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 57). When viewing photographic representations postmodernists often ask crucial questions (Struken & Cartwright, 2001): Who controls the meanings/interpretations of a given photograph? What dominant discourses are re-presented? Whose readings matter?

The images captured in photographs are only illusions that are always given new meaning(s) each time they are viewed. Photographs are fluid re-presentations of an experience as mediated through the limitations of image, language, and cultural production, and as such are open to a variety of interpretations that resist the notion that one ideal or correct reading can exist.

Whose reading counts?

In popular culture and media "discourses of style, form, and authority are [often] employed to replace questions concerning how power is mobilized by diverse dominant groups to oppress, marginalize, and exploit large portions of the [North] American population" (Giroux, 1993, p. 35). Through this hegemonic process dominant groups attempt to create and secure a "politics of representation" (Giroux, 1993, p. 36) that works to legitimize their own interests, ideologies, and power at the expense of the marginalized. In schools this cultural control and mediated representation reflects the struggle to eliminate non-canonical knowledges and the experiences of oppressed groups from the curriculum and/or school culture.

Photographs and photographic re-presentations can also be used to create a counter discourse that utilizes a series of objects of knowledge in the struggle for self-expression, recognition, and voice in the face of dominant culture-power ideologies (Boffin & Fraser, 1991; Gallo, 2001; Giroux, 1993; Harper, 2000). In her research Hedy Bach (1998) refers to this process as the creation of visual narratives in which research participants are provided with the photographic opportunity to produce their own understandings that can contrast and contest the knowledge that they have received from the dominant culture or "evaded curriculum". This visual narrative process can allow participants to become self-reflexive and critical knowledge producers as they attempt to visually describe the positions and locations from which they attempt to speak. Through the creation of this visual pedagogy, participants can create their own cultural texts and markers that speak to their specific historical, political, and personal locations.

Visualizing Queer research

In this research project I am concerned with how Queer young adults construct, display, and come to understand social, cultural, educational, and personal aspects of their identities within Alberta as a predominately conservative province. In 1998 the Supreme Court of Canada, in the *Vriend* decision, read sexual orientation into Alberta's Individual Rights Protection Act as a protected ground against discrimination. Before this landmark judgment the Alberta government knowingly and systematically denied Queer persons basic human rights protection. Despite this judicial intervention by the Supreme Court of Canada, many Queer persons in Alberta are still constructed as sex-and-gender

outlaws who are relegated to the margins of educational, cultural, and social institutions. The visual dimension of this research project allows for a fleeting glance into how these Queer identities are culturally produced and regulated as fugitive identities that are often visually carved into Queer young adults' bodies, homes, families, and experiences (Hill 1996).

The research method that I employed involved providing the four research participants with Kodak 27 exposure disposable cameras. I asked each of the research participants to take photographs that represented various aspects of their formal and non-formal educational experiences and Queer lives. I provided initial guiding themes to assist the research participants in the early stages of their photographic project (See Appendix D). All of the research participants were provided with the opportunity to expand on the suggested themes, and they were invited to take as many or as few photographs as they wished. Possible photographic themes that I suggested included identity, safety, school experiences, family, community supports, homophobia, heterosexism, secrets, dreams, hopes, and desires. By using photographs as part of my multi-faceted research strategy I hoped that the research participants would create photographs that *talked back* (hooks, 1989) to certain aspects that represented their sex-and-gender differences and educational experiences.

Prior to beginning their photographic work, ethical considerations and responsibilities were carefully reviewed with each of the research participants. As sex-and-gender outlaws Queer persons often have to hide their Queerness in order to maintain their safety, anonymity, and confidentiality. Each research participant

was asked to take pictures of images, symbols, and objects only – not identifiable people.

Deconstructing images

After the research participants finished constructing their photographs I had them return the cameras to me undeveloped. Once I had the photographs developed, I returned one set of the photographs back to the research participants. I kept the second set of photographs and used them to develop themes and questions for conversation that we could use as a starting point to explore the images, symbols, objects, and ideas captured in each research participant's photographs (Weiser, 1999).

In order to uncover and investigate the themes contained within the research participant's photographs I began to analyze individually each research participant's pictures by laying out all of their photographs on a large table. I arranged the photographs in the original order taken by the research participant. Collier & Collier (1987) describe this process as a "consolidated experience" (p. 181) in which the researcher can move freely amidst the photographs in an attempt to look for overarching themes and meanings. By using this "open viewing" (Collier & Collier, 1987, p. 181) technique I was attempting to respond to the photographs in an unstructured way that provided for an intuitive overview of the visual narratives. As themes emerged from this open viewing I grouped photographs into thematic categories and began an analysis of the visual narratives by recording any questions or thoughts that the photographs provoked within me. By engaging in an initial unstructured, and then more structured

analysis of the research participant's visual narratives, I was able to begin to develop a list of questions and themes that I could then use in the next phase of my multi-method research strategy (See Appendix E).

After a mutually established period of time, in which both the research participants and I had had the opportunity to review the photographs, I met with them individually and we engaged in a conversation that centered around the "selectively framed information" (Weiser, 1999) contained in their images. Before each of our photographic discussions began, each research participant was given the opportunity to remove or destroy any photographs that he or she felt uncomfortable discussing or including in this research study.

I purposely decided not to enlarge or mount the research participant's photographs on poster boards or displays for our photographic discussions. Instead I wanted the research participants to be able to hold and touch the photographs that they created. It was my goal to encourage the research participants to develop a physical and emotional intimacy with their visual narratives. I did not want to create an objective storyboard that had the photographs ordered and thematically sequenced in a traditional documentary style. I wanted to encourage the research participants to make their own sense and meaning of their visual narratives. In keeping with a poststructural perspective (Lather & Smithies, 1997), I encouraged the research participants to become the story makers and storytellers of their own images and experiences.

Through this deconstruction process we developed a form of relational inquiry in which we collaboratively explored the photographs and attempted to

explore critically the memories, images, and emotions that these photographs evoked from our conscious and subconscious minds. By using a relational form of inquiry, the research participant is no longer the traditional "subject" of the interview process. Instead they become the "expert guide" who leads the researcher through the stories, memories, and experiences contained within the photographs (Collier & Collier, 1987, p. 106). This memory work serves as a way to further understand the Queer young adult's experiences within social, cultural, family, and educational discourses (Haug, 1987).

By deconstructing the photographs I wanted to investigate how the research participants resist, adapt, and navigate their way through heteronormative educational and cultural spaces. As the research participants used photographs to capture some of their formal and non-formal educational and cultural experiences, they generated new ways of perceiving themselves and their abilities as Queer persons. In this sense the camera became a political and pedagogical instrument that contributes to the creation of a Queer public pedagogy of resist-stance, hope, and possibility.

Queer visual narratives

Of the four research participants only Alex and Jordana felt comfortable enough to take photographs that represented their experiences. Keith and Jamie opted to create photo collages as an alternative (and perhaps less threatening) way to express their experiences. Taking photographs can become a very personal experience that may leave a research participant feeling vulnerable and exposed as they revisit difficult and potentially painful memories of what it was like to be

a Queer young adult in a heteronormative culture. Alex had this to say about his involvement in the photographic process:

> I got to learn a lot about myself and how these pictures reflect me. Each one of them reflects how I felt at the time and what I have been through.... I'm really happy that I got to take the photographs. I'm going to sort them out first. The ones that don't reflect my life right now, I'm going to put them away in a box. I'm not going to throw them away. That's like ripping a part of your history away.

Jordana viewed the photographic experience this way:

> I love photography. I love taking pictures. I wouldn't mind taking pictures of myself if I looked a bit better. The photos are how I see the world and the moments that are really precious to me.... Everything in the pictures has meaning to me. They all have a really interesting story.... I feel like I'm even attached to those pictures. They are pictures that I will never forget. I really liked doing this project.

As these comments suggest, "visual images have their own biographies" (Pink, 2001, p. 95). The creation of these visual narratives can provide for a conscious (and at times unconscious) reflection on how the personal thoughts, experiences, and feelings of Queer young adults are lived out in public and private spaces. These visual narratives serve as an active resistance to normalizing pedagogies that seek to devalue, defame, and demoralize Queer lives. The research participants' photographs and collages also become a tangible way to visualize and live out the tenants of a critical pedagogy that seeks to empower Queer young adults to become active agents in the critique, reflection, and ultimately re-construction of their daily realities.

In the construction of this critical pedagogy key questions should be asked as Queer young adults take up the creation of visual narratives: What are the risks involved in these acts of visual resistance? Are these visual narratives merely

aesthetic or do they have deeper and multiple meanings for the research participants? What implications do these visual narratives have for the regulatory discourses that are present within formal educational institutions? Are these acts of resistance forms of cultural negotiation or attempts at social transformation? How is the creation of these visual narratives more than what Giroux (1993) calls "hip pedagogical posturing" (p. 48)? How might these visual narratives be read differently by differently situated viewers? How do these visual narratives represent a Queer discourse of desire that is subjugated and outlawed in formal educational environments? How do these visual narratives take up and question notions of power, privilege, and possibility?

Queering the gaze

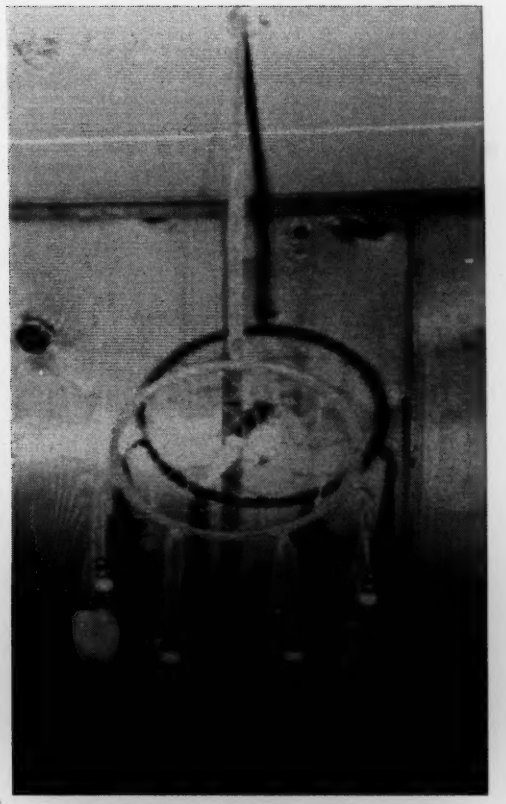
The following photographs represent some of the key visual narratives that Jordana and Alex created to represent their formal and non-formal educational experiences. As you view the photographs I encourage you to reflect upon and revisit the question: What is life like for Queer young adults in Alberta schools and communities?

I took pictures of a flower. One picture is of it in the morning when the flower is open and alive as it tries to adapt to the day. The other picture is at night when the flower is closed and adapting to the darkness. I just thought it was beautiful. It's red and red is my favourite colour. The flower is trying to adapt to day and night like we all do.... When you need energy you always open yourself up and you feel free and safe. When you are closed you feel kind of dark and scared.

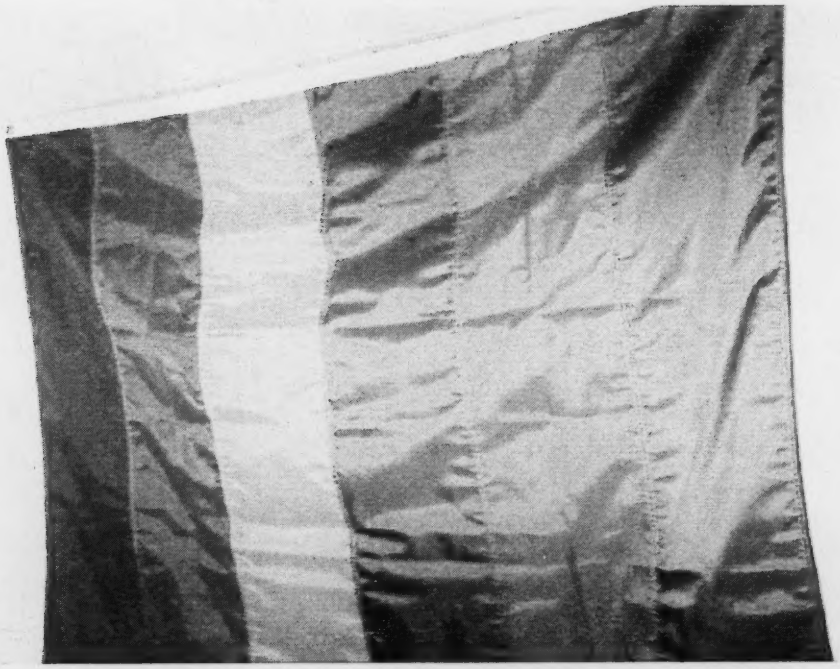
Everything is constantly changing and you have to learn how to adapt.... I'm like the open flower now. There is so much more that I am going to learn and be open to share, just like the flower. She is open to beauty, but also drawing energy from the sun. That's how I feel. I'm the red.

[This photo is] actually a man in a bra. It's diversity and being free and being who you are. It's just a picture of his back, yet it says a lot. I think it's a million words of who he likes to be and I respect him for that and I will always be there for him.... [This photo says] I'm proud of who I am and I'm not embarrassed or shy to show it.

This is a mural of pictures that represent anything that was female and lesbian. It's what I like to look at everyday. It's part of me. [This photo says] what I like to look or be like, except that I don't want to do that anymore. I don't want to look or be like anyone. I'm just me.... It inspired me for a little while to keep up with who I am and search for myself. I tried to find myself in these pictures, but I couldn't. I had to find myself in my own life.



The dream catcher. A really amazing lady gave this to me after I went to a cleansing ceremony with my dad.... This lady just thought I needed it. She said that I had a lot of dreams and wishes that needed to come true.... It holds a lot of my dreams. Ever since I've had it I've had a lot of wishes and dreams and inspirations come true. For example, one of my biggest wishes was to be free. I am free. I'm very free. Another one was to get to really know myself and love myself, and I do. I also wanted to become a more useful person. I have been this year. I've helped people out by sharing what I've been through. I need to share it. Look it's happening right now. I know that it is going to capture more dreams of mine and they will come true. It's a very powerful object. In some ways it's very intense just to talk about it.



There's a lot that my pride flag says. I bought it when I came out. I've had it ever since I've been free. Every colour has a meaning for me. I haven't figured out what green and yellow mean yet.

Purple means reliability and trust.
Blue means purity and innocence.

Red is my favourite colour. For me it is not a colour of passion. For me it is the colour of blood. I have a lot of scars. I've seen a lot of blood because of my scars and slashing myself. It has a lot of meaning for me.

Red tells me I am alive. Red means life to me.

Orange is the colour of youth.
It reminds me of nourishment and nurturing.

I'll figure out what green and yellow mean to me in the future.

I hope that I have a long life to live.

This pride flag will always be with me. It has seen a lot. It has always been hanging there on my wall.

I talk to her every night.

After we discussed all of Jordana's photos I handed her a blank photograph and asked her if there were any pictures that she avoided or was fearful of taking.

[This would be] the outside of my parent's house.... Although I'm closer to my parents I couldn't share any of these pictures with them. They don't want to see it... I love them and their house. It's the first house that they bought since they moved to Canada. It's a house I never really got to live in. Once they did buy it I was in the hospital and then I did live in it for a month and then I got kicked out when they found out that I was a lesbian.

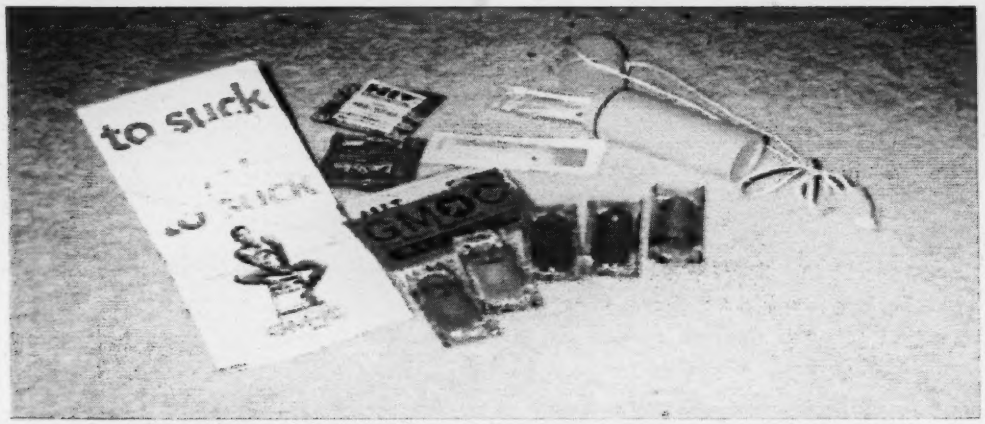
Alex's visual narratives

Choir is a place where I can feel safe, especially in a university setting.... Anyone seen in a choir in high school is assumed to be gay. Singing is not seen as a masculine thing. [In university] they choose to be in choir. That's what they want to do. Choir is also a pre-requisite for getting your [music] degree. People understand that not everybody in there is going to be gay. A lot of people do it out of passion. That's what matters more. You see someone through their abilities and not through their sexual orientation.

This is a traditional Chinese environment – Dim Sum.... Because it is very traditional I didn't feel safe as a gay youth there.... If they found out that my mom had a gay son, we would not be worthy enough to talk to. Having face or prestige is more important than anything else in a Chinese setting.

This is where it all begins. This is where you find out who you are. You begin to develop your identity as a person.... On the playground I was the different one. I was Chinese. I've developed an identity that I'm different than everyone else. I'm fine with that. I guess I found out that I create controversy wherever I go.

This is a wall of pornographic videos.... This is a place you go to learn about yourself.... The videos are just fantasies. They are not real and a lot of it practices unsafe sex.... I see this as a part of my past life.



There are ways to practice safe sex. It's not taught in schools with information for gays and lesbians.... Groups like Youth Understanding Youth[17] and OUTreach[18] have nights where you learn about the statistics and facts and stuff.

This is a bunch of gay and lesbian resources at the public library.... I took this picture to show, especially to people that are questioning or who are having issues with themselves, that there are resources out there. If you don't feel comfortable or safe talking to people there are always books available.

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[17] Youth Understanding Youth (YUY) is a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, straight, Queer, and questioning social/support group for youth under twenty-five years of age in the Edmonton area.
[18] OUTreach is a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender campus group for students at the University of Alberta.

This is a really neat display. I took the picture because you can see all the resources out there for schools.... I don't know why I haven't seen this in high school. They should be more open to it.... Where were you when I was in junior and senior high school?

I took this picture of my friend who decorated everything of his with gay paraphernalia. He has a lot of pride in who he is. He knows who he is. He's not afraid to show it. I think everyone should be like that.

A critical practice of viewing

Blending together theoretical discourses from cultural studies, Queer theory, and critical pedagogy can serve to assist in the creation of a critical practice of viewing that is necessary for a postmodern exploration into the meanings, culture, and history that are consciously and unconsciously embedded in visual imagery. What thoughts came to your mind as you viewed Jordana's and Alex's visual narratives and Kevin and Jamie's collages? How do these photographs speak to the formal and non-formal educational experiences of Queer young adults in Alberta? What stories do these visual narratives tell?

A critical practice of viewing questions how power and authority work to establish the form, function, and legitimacy of visual re-presentational practices (Giroux & Simon, 1994). In the case of Alex and Jordana's photographs this critical visual literacy seeks to destabilize and uncover the dominant discourses and discursive practices that encode their experiences with a hidden cultural capital that works to maintain the unquestioned heteronormative status quo. This critical viewing practice encourages the viewer to move beyond the frame of the photograph and to examine the photographer as well.

The gaze of each photographer is captured in every picture that they take. Photographs are living historical constructions that require viewers to engage them critically through an active and analytical deconstructive process that calls into question modernist notions of originality, authenticity, and representational truth (Giroux & Simon, 1994). No matter what the subject is, the photographer never remains invisible (Weiser, 2001). Larger societal structures and discourses

shape the photographer's lens and are always mirrored in the photographic image. A critical viewer challenges taken-for-granted assumptions that photographs are objective and contain an unmediated vision of Truth.

A poststructural approach to research and photography seeks to place the camera in the hands of the research participants in an attempt to provide them with an opportunity to represent their own voices and agency. Traditional documentary techniques have sought to fix subject/object positions in an attempt to capture a representational Truth (Banks & Morphy, 1997; Collier & Collier, 1987; Pink, 2001). Critical poststructuralists seek to extend the frame of the photograph to uncover how the photographer and the photograph are all a part of the complex matrix of culture, power, voice, representation, and authority.

A poststructural approach to photographic research practices requires the researcher and viewer to examine critical questions. Who is represented in the photographs? Are these representations accurate? Who is the photographer? What relationship does the photographer have to the person, image, or object being photographed? Where are these photographs being circulated and viewed? Who are the viewers? Who owns the image(s) represented?

To establish this critical viewing practice, Giroux and Simon (1994) enumerate a series of viewing/reading principles. The first principle requires the viewer to identify and locate how visual cultural representations are embedded within larger historical, cultural, and political contexts. Second, critical viewership ought to move beyond voyeuristic practices by exploring how "issues of audience, address, and reception configure within cultural circuits of power to

produce particular subject positions and secure specific forms of authority" (p. 103). This concept requires the viewer to problematize notions of inclusion and exclusion, voice and representation. Third, a critical viewing practice works to understand how representations are inscribed and implicated in larger meta-narratives of "truth, value, and power" (Giroux & Simon, 1994, p. 103). Fourth, this critical viewing practice requires the viewer to look within him or herself to understand how he or she can learn to rewrite, reclaim, and re-present these visual images as a part of a critical, transformative, and empowering pedagogical practice.

A poststructural approach takes this critical viewing practice one step further by inviting viewers to become their own imagemakers. In this process the viewer is also the viewed, since the view becomes involved in a self-reflective analysis as he or she works to make meaning and sense of the images presented in the pictures taken. As part of a liberatory pedagogical process, this approach strives to challenge the power of representation, agency, and voice and move it into the hands of those who have traditionally been rendered voiceless and powerless by the dominant discourses and discursive practices that permeate our culture and knowledge landscapes. By reclaiming visual and textual space marginalized individuals and groups can represent and speak for themselves "in ways which suggest that they can imagine differently in order to act differently" (Giroux & Simon, 1994, p. 105).

Creating a Queer public pedagogy of representation

In their analysis of developing a critical photographic practice, Giroux & Simon (1994) suggest that we ought to also examine the pedagogy of representation. They define this representational pedagogy as the "complex and inherently political intersection of the production and selection of image and text, the specification of their context and mode of production, and the formation of structures within which their engagement can be extended and challenged" (p. 103). Giroux (1993) also reminds us that as critical educators we

> have to become border crossers, allowing the focus of [our] analysis to shift, move, to circle back on itself, and push against its own discourse so as to extend and deepen its implications for critical pedagogy while tracing out a recognizable shape of the complexity that informed its underlying project (p. 78).

As such, a critically Queer public pedagogy of representation ought to question democratic principles as it reasserts the "primacy of the social, incorporates multiple struggles, builds alliances, and recaptures the concept of solidarity as a central element of a pedagogy of hope and possibility" (Giroux, 1993, p. 78). This pedagogy needs to examine why differences should not be erased or forgotten, but rather linked together in a collective vision of a democratic struggle to build and strengthen a more just and inclusive society.

In a public pedagogy educators are required to become cultural workers who are committed to living out the tenants of democracy, freedom, and social justice in their educational work (Giroux, 1993). From a Queer perspective these cultural workers should attempt to account for the absences in curriculum and silences in educational discourse that ignore and exclude Queer persons and

Queer history. This Queer public pedagogy is positioned as a deliberative attempt to create the conditions in which dominant forms of heteronormative knowledge can be questioned, deconstructed, and critiqued. For example, photographs and visual images can used in a politics of representation that reinforces and reproduces the social order, or they can be a part of a counter politics that actively works to transform and question dominant ways of knowing and understanding (Giroux & Simon, 1994). Thus the research participant's visual narratives can provide an example of a Queer public pedagogy of visibility and transformation as they work to provide counter narratives to dominant educational and cultural images that exclude Queer identities, knowledge, and desire.

Widening the Lens

Photographs and visual imagery represent one powerful way to provide research participants with the words that they cannot or dare not say aloud. By creating visual narratives we attempt to capture the memories and experiences that matter most to us. We often use photographs to provide a glimpse into who we are, where we have been, and what we have to say. Photographs, pictures, and images are a universal means of communication that transcend the limitations of language, race, age, gender, culture, sexual orientation, and gender identity. No two photographs or images will reveal the same information about a subject or object as each photograph contains multiple truths that are always connected to larger discourses of power and knowledge. All photographs, collages, and other visual images have a background story that invites the viewer into the creator's world.

In this research project I have used photography as a research method that seeks to promote a critical consciousness-raising that encourages the research participants to document aspects of Queer their lives in the ways that they see them. These photographs and collages represent a form of autobiography that is often in sharp contrast to the ways that many educators and policy makers view the lives and experiences of Queer young adults in Alberta schools and communities. These photographs and visual images serve as a way to reflect the experiences of Queer young adults back upon their communities as they reveal their everyday hopes, dreams, and struggles to be, become, and belong as full and valued members of their schools, families, and communities.

Jamie

Age 22

Always On The Outside

Excluded from certain rights.
Just because I'm gay.

I'm different.
I think it's in a good way.

They think I'm different in a bad way.

I'm **always on the outside.**

Angry.
Frustrated.
Confused.

I dated boys.
I learned to disguise it.
I was in denial.

I'm always on the outside.

Then I came out.

It has really strained the relationship with my dad.
There's always this weird tension in the air.
He feels like he had a part in it.

He never says the word gay.
I've never heard him use the word lesbian.

It's the same with my mom.
She used the word lesbian for the first time today,
and she whispered it.

I'm always on the outside.

I'm The Lesbian

Out and vocal.
I'm everyone's punching bag.

Gender roles.
Sexuality.
Deviance.

All eyes in the classroom fall on me.
All attacks fall on me.

It's hard.
I don't want everything to be about me.

I have other things that I want to waste my energy, tears, and laughter on.

To most of my classmates that's who I am.
I'm the lesbian.

Teaching It Wrong

There's that other box that never seems to exist on any form.
Schools really aren't giving me an option to talk about it.

I wasn't learning the words.
I never learned about gay history or culture.
They just left me on my own to figure it out.

Missed opportunities.

It doesn't take very many positive comments.
It just takes one.
If I had just one suggestion that lesbians actually exist.
It would have changed my whole life.

On the other hand,
the negative comments just hit you in the gut.

There are no gays in this school.

I'm sitting right here!
Apparently I don't exist.

I've seen this teacher as a mentor.

In one moment everything changes.
I can no longer respect them.

Wow, that's really offensive, bye.

Fade Away

Fade into the background.
Pass through the halls.

I don't feel very safe.

A scrunched look of disgust on their face.

You disgusting lesbians.

No one turned a head.
No one was offended.

Apparently you don't care!

They don't know anything about me.

So full of hate.

At physical risk.

Fade away.

Get out of the situation as fast as you can.

Fade away.

Truth and Fear

The world isn't a perfect place.
At least I have my integrity.

I have people who love me for who I am.

I started to be myself when I came out at eighteen.
That was the point in my life when things really started to fit together.

I actually feel like I can be myself now.

It's easier to live in **truth** than to hide in **fear**.

At first I was shy and reclusive.
I was unsure of who I was.

I was unsure of where I was going.

We are driven into the dark corners of the night.
People are so angry and hateful towards us when we are out in the light.

When I walk down main street holding my partner's hand,
I don't get a lot of smiles.

Now I see myself as an activist.

The gay community has given me so much.
I have the strength and power to find happiness in being who I am.

I owe it to every gay person out there that's fighting.
I owe it to every gay person living in the closet.
I owe it to them all to put myself forward and speak OUT.

It's easier to live in truth than to hide in fear.

If it's not talked about and fought for,
nothing will ever get done.

Matthew Shepard

There is a physical risk in being out.
People are actually getting hurt.
It's not just a joke.
It's not insignificant.

Little things need to be done so everyone can feel safe.

Matthew Shepard.

Do you realize that you are talking about me?
You are saying that it is ok to kill me too!

Am I taking this too personally?

Homophobia and heterosexism start really subtle.
Teachers really don't do anything about it.
It escalates.
It snowballs.

I don't dare open my mouth.
I'm going to get it later.

Turn on your heart.
Doesn't it bother you?

The Bible Made Him Do It

I feel most threatened in Church.

I will never set foot in one again.
I feel completely alienated.

I used to attend a Baptist youth group.

I was noticeably different.
I didn't fit.

I started asking questions.
I never got answers.

The basis of faith is suppose to be about love and acceptance.

Jerry Falwell[19].
Fred Phelps[20].

Annihilate homosexuals.

The bible made him do it.

Are they coming for me next?

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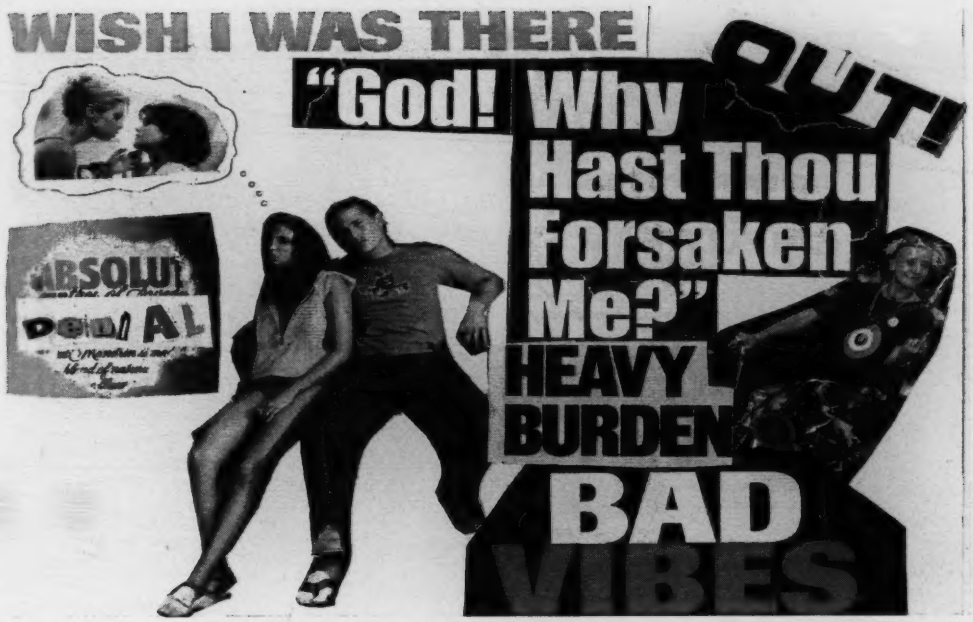
[19] The Reverend Jerry Falwell blamed gays and lesbians, among other groups, for the September 11th terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. On September 14th, 2001 Reverend Falwell made the following statement on the Christian television show "700 Club": "I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America. I point the finger in their face and say 'you helped this happen.'" Falwell later apologized for his remarks (CNN, 2001).

[20] Reverend Fred Phelps, of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, and a group of his followers protested Matthew Shepard's funeral and the subsequent murder trial in Wyoming. Phelps and his disciples carried signs that stated "Matt in Hell" and "No Special Laws for Fags". Phelps also maintains a website (www.godhatesfags.com) that counts down the "number of days Matthew Shepard has been in Hell" and has a picture of Matthew burning in flames that features a link that allows visitors to hear "Matthew scream in hell" (CNN, 1999).



I'm Here And I'm Happy

The worst thing about being gay is the discrimination.

Inner homophobia is the killer.
You feel ashamed.
You're brought up to think it's wrong.
I don't know any gay person who ever gets rid of that feeling.

It's hard.
It's really hard.
You have your days that are better than others.

It's also hard seeing that look of loss on your mother's face.
It's almost like I'm dead.

I'm here.
I'm happy.
I have someone that loves me.
I'm doing things that are meaningful in my life.
I see my life going in a positive direction.

Why is it that you are acting like I've gone somewhere else?

The Internet

The Internet is why I came out.
I was like a kid in the candy store.
I had fingertip access to a concentrated world,
where everyone I talked to could be gay.
It made it so much easier to find what I need to find.
The Internet was how I met my first girlfriend .

I learned about the Holocaust.
Black triangles[21].
Pink triangles.
We never learned this in school.
It was written out of the textbooks.

The Internet is anonymous.
I don't have to worry about how I look,
or what someone is going to think of me,
or the fact that I'm nervous.

I can find what I want on my own terms.

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[21] The inverted black and pink triangles are one of the most prominent and recognizable symbols of the Queer community. The history behind the triangles is rooted in the persecution of lesbian and gay persons in Nazi Germany. During the Nazi regime many lesbian and gay people were sent to concentration camps where all prisoners were required to wear coloured inverted triangles that identified the reason(s) for their imprisonment.

Yellow for Jews

Green for criminals

Brown for Gypsies

Pink for gay men

Red for political prisoners

Purple for Jehovah's Witnesses

Black for lesbians and anti-socials

The pink triangle was 2-3 centimeters larger than all the other triangles, which made it easier for the guards to select gay men to endure some of the most horrific atrocities.

In the 1970's the gay and lesbian liberation movement reclaimed the pink triangle as a symbol of gay and lesbian pride, resiliency, and determination. In the 1980's the pink triangle appeared as a political symbol to protest AIDS discrimination. Today, the pink triangle stands as an enduring symbol of gay and lesbian pride that reminds the world to never forget to speak up against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender human rights abuses (Heinz, 1995).

Youth Understanding Youth

Words can't even describe…

I came out of nowhere really.
I suppose a lot of people come to the group that way.

That's how it is.
You are in hiding,
and all of the sudden there was this possibility.
Being gay wasn't just a word anymore.
It was a possibility!

There were friends, dances, and debates to be had,
and books to be read.
It changed everything.

It was the difference between,
I can't get out of bed in the morning,
to now, I'm so excited I can't sleep.

That big of a difference.

Normal Is Boring

I didn't choose to be gay,
but I wouldn't change it.

I want to utilize my difference in a positive way.
That's the exciting thing for me.

I'm counter balancing the dominant culture that doesn't ask enough why questions.
They just blindly follow traditions, rules, and norms.
It doesn't leave a lot of room to just be who you are,
do what you need to do,
and love who you need to love.

I'm proud that I know I'm being myself.
Because I'm a lesbian,
I know that I am being myself.

It's by no means easy.

For any out gay and lesbian person,
simply existing is a courageous act.

It's that element of pride.
It's the one thing that I will always hold onto.

I will fight to the bitter end for that rainbow flag.

Chapter Five

Pedagogical Messages

"A risk-free environment is a learning-free environment"
(Friend, 1998, p. 160).

"Schools must dare to interrupt reproduction, [they] must engage young people in conversations of intellect and courage, and dare to educate for critical inquiry and civic participation across lines of 'difference'"
(Weis & Fine, 2001, p. 521).

Introduction

In this concluding chapter I reflect on the different research methodologies that I have used in this research investigation, and I explore how they can influence contemporary critical research strategies and instructional methods for adult educators of young adults. First I explore how Queer theory and discourse can contribute to the creation of an inclusive pedagogy that embraces and affirms sex-and-gender differences. Next I discuss how found poetry techniques can be utilized to build a relational inquiry space that characterizes research as a thoughtful, wakeful, and collaborative process that explores how teaching, learning, and research are a dynamic and tightly interwoven process. Next I examine how visual narrative research techniques can add layers of depth and complexity to qualitative research methodologies and critical instructional approaches. To conclude I explore absences in current Queer educational research, and I outline how more research is needed that explores Queer youth resiliency and activism in Canadian schools and communities.

I. Sex-and-gender differences and education: Dangerous knowledge

Many forms of knowledge are considered dangerous, because as Foucault (1980) has established, knowledge is considered a dominant and regulating form of power. Knowledge concerning sexualities in general, and Queer desire in particular, are considered two of the most dangerous forms of knowledge that a student or teacher can possess (Epstein & Sears, 1999, p. 1).

In most formal educational institutions heteronormative knowledge, discourse, and privilege are accorded a dominant and unquestioned position of truth and power in relation to understandings of gender and sexuality (Epstein & Sears, 1999, p. 2). In these educative institutions heterosexuality, in a Focaultian sense, is considered to be a regulatory regime of truth or master narrative that students and teachers must abide by or they will face disciplinary consequences for their deviance (Epstein & Sears, 1999).

In their book, *A dangerous knowing: Sexuality, pedagogy and popular culture,* Epstein & Sears (1999) ask "How can we practice a pedagogy of sexualities that embraces desire while interrogating knowledge and honours the multiplicities of voice while challenging the master narrative? In short, how can we nurture a dangerous knowing?" (p. 4). How do we create an inclusive pedagogical approach that affirms sexual diversity in our classrooms? What kinds of spaces need to be created within educational institutions and instructional methods to build these communities of difference (Tierney, 1993)?

In order to embrace and nurture this dangerous knowledge in our classrooms, educators need to become border crossers (Giroux, 1994) who think

critically about sex-and-gender differences and how they are constructed and maintained to reinforce and regulate the status quo in schools and the larger culture. Educators can use the discourses of Queer theory and Queer pedagogy as one way to navigate and transgress these borders in an effort to create more just, inclusive, and democratic classrooms.

The value of Queer for an inclusive pedagogy

The value of Queer to building an inclusive pedagogical approach stems from using Queer concepts, theory, and identity to provide a space and place in the classroom to take seriously the questions of identity politics and sexual difference. A Queer pedagogical approach strives to question and expand notions of inclusion to take account of sex-and-gender differences as an important pedagogical site that explores how identities are socially, culturally, and politically constructed to maintain and reproduce the heteronormative status quo. As Sedgwick (1990) suggests a Queer pedagogical approach examines critically issues of race, class, ethnicity, and post-colonial nationality as students engage the curriculum, media, and other dominant forms of education. Through the development of a Queer critical literacy students are encouraged to use a new lens from which to analyze and read events "backwards from the present, using new symbolic languages to give past events new meaning" (McLaren, 1995, p. 111). This critical literacy allows students to problematize notions of democracy, community, and inclusion, and it can help to examine the ways in which marginalized groups have been mis/represented in the curriculum and larger culture.

Building an inclusive pedagogy for social justice

Teaching for social justice lies at the heart of education in Canada's democratic society. The pursuit of freedom, social justice, and democracy requires the creation of open, dialogic, and inclusive spaces in classrooms and communities that are constantly in the process of construction, deconstruction, and contestation. These open and free spaces present critical questions and challenges for teachers and students. In these spaces questions asked include: Whose voices are included? Whose voices are excluded? What knowledge is of most worth in our schools? These are urgent questions. Thoughtful and critical inquiry can serve to push our dialogue and imagination further as teachers and students struggle over the meaning and nature of democracy in an increasingly multicultural and pluralistic Canadian society. In this struggle we seek to "release our imaginations" (Greene, 1995) in a desire to dream, and to move forward "without guarantees, but with purpose and hope" (Ayers, 2000, p. viii).

As Weis & Fine (2000) suggest, "much of the pedagogical and political work of forming self and communities, by youth, takes place well outside the borders of schooling" (p. xi). As critical educators we need to recognize and examine these border zones as influential sites of educational knowledge and practice. For Queer young adults, educational knowledge is not only present in formalized schools and universities; important learning also occurs in front of the television, at the dinner table, in bars, and within lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community groups.

When formal educational environments turn their backs on the educational needs and experiences of Queer young adults, only some of these youth "are fortunate enough to find the strength and fortitude to continue educating themselves and each other in spaces they craft and tenaciously hold onto, often against great odds" (Weis & Fine, 2001, p. 498). Many Queer young adults live their lives in the liminal spaces that exist between their schools, families, and communities. In these spaces they search for their lost identities, possibilities, and hope. These subterranean spaces often serve as a refuge and safe haven in which Queer young adults can come together with an urgency and insurgency that calls for their voices to be heard and their identities to be respected.

These are spaces of "deep, sustained community-based educative work… [that] serve to sculpt real and imaginary corners for peace, solace, communion, social critique, personal and collective work." (Weis & Fine, 2001, p. 498). It is within these spaces that we bear witness to "deeply educative pedagogies, politics, and moves toward self and community, a reshaping of borders, fractures, and social realignments" (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. xii). It is in these spaces that imagination is released, and hope, and possibility exist.

While protection based on the ground of sexual orientation has been read into *Alberta's Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Act* (See Vriend v. Alberta, 1998) many educational institutions continue to develop an active passivity towards sex-and-gender differences, discrimination, and homophobic violence. This passivity often inflicts scars on the bodies of many Queer students

who experience identity erasure and silence on a daily basis in the institutions that are designed to "educate all students well" (Alberta's Education Partners, 2000).

In Alberta the bodies of Queer students house lived and learned experiences that contain personal, social, cultural, political, and familial knowledges that have created and positioned their identities as sex-and-gender OUTlaws. As outlaws they must be regulated and controlled lest the knowledge of their fugitive identities leak out and contaminate the classrooms and hallways of their schools (Fine & Bertram, 1999). Fine and Bertram (1999) ask where are the spaces where "marginalized youth and adults can reclaim identities; embrace taboo relations and queer public stares; critique hegemony and turn it on its head" (p. 158)? Where are these educative spaces for Queer young adults in Alberta schools? "Where are the corners in which class, race, language, gender and sexuality and (dis)abilities can be reclaimed, reconstituted and taken back? .... We ask this because we struggle to find (and delight when we do) those spaces from which the next generation of political work emerges" (Fine & Bertram, 1999, p. 158).

Queer young adults struggle to find these spaces, often only stumbling across them by fortuitous accident. These spaces offer a home and a place of refuge and community that can be far more nurturing and supportive than any classroom or family environment in which they currently live. These spaces represent a crack, fissure, or break in the compulsory heterosexuality that engulfs Queer young adults' daily lives. In these spaces "individual dreams, collective work and critical thoughts are stolen, smuggled in and reimagined (Fine &

Bertram, 1999, p. 158). There are no rigid boundaries, fixed rules, broken promises, or disciplinary regimes. These are Queer public pedagogical sites in which tidy identity categories are contested, stereotypes challenged, and new possibilities imagined.

Increasingly these radical educational sites are found in the creation of gay/straight alliances or Queer youth community groups. Nancy Fraser (1993) identifies these radical spaces as "counterpublics" that are necessarily formed "out of the very exclusionary practices of the public sphere" (Fine & Bertram, 1999, p. 158). Evans & Boyte (1992) concur with Fraser and identify these radical and progressive places as "free spaces". These free spaces are

> vibrant, alive, fundamentally self-created and often deeply contradictory. They may be transitory, healing, and mobilizing. They may be segregated spaces or contexts in which individuals cross borders of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, to find a small corner in which to breathe in peace (Fine & Bertram, 1999, p. 158).

In these free spaces, through social critique and community, a reverse discourse can emerge that enables members to rethink, refashion, and explore their sex-and-gender differences as fluid, contextual, and positive aspects of their identity.

As Fine & Bertram (1999) further suggest

> schools and communities can be viewed, at once, binocularly, as sites of oppressive surveillance, humiliation and scrutiny, patrolling the borders of racism, patriarchy and heterosexism, and as free(ish) spaces in which incredibly productive, democratic and radical relations for social transformation are being ignited (p. 161).

How can educators create these free spaces in their classrooms and schools? How might they envision and develop an inclusive pedagogy that creates communities

of difference in which Queer young adults are accepted and respected for their sex-and-gender differences?

Bringing Queer into the classroom

As Peter McLaren (1995) suggests, a critically Queer perspective can inform and expand an inclusive pedagogical approach when it strives to (1) break down the binaries of us/them, good/evil, and hetero/homosexuality that serve to fix identities as unitary and essentialist, (2) problematize the concept of gender as a socially and culturally constructed category that can, instead be considered multiple, situational, and open to re/negotiation, (3) identify the dominant social and cultural forces that normalize heterosexuality and, in turn, marginalizes homosexuality, (4) explore critically how institutional educational structures serve to regulate, shape, and constrain sexual identities in the school and larger community, (5) build communities of dialogue and practice in which teachers and students can come together to explore strategies to create a liberating counterhegemonic discourse, and (5) create communities of support by building alliances with other progressive social movements that engage in antiracist, antisexist, and human rights work (p. 119-121).

These theoretical insights can serve as a starting point for educators who wish to develop an inclusive pedagogy that strives to build communities of difference in which the concepts of Queer theory, sexual identity, and identity politics are debated and investigated in schools. Through this liberatory discourse, educators and students can begin to move Queer beyond the discourses of high theory and textual analysis into a practical everyday engagement that strives to

create democratic classrooms that "struggle for social justice and the construction of a more radical democracy" (McLaren, 1995, p. 119).

II. Found poetry as relational inquiry

"Who comes closer to truth – the poet or the theorist"
(Greene, 2000, p. 300)?

Using found poetry as an arts-based educational research technique characterizes the researcher-researched relationship as an intimate experience. Through a reciprocal and relational form of inquiry, the researcher and the research participants play an equally important role in one another's self-development and self-understanding. Alternative forms of representation, such as, found poetry can become a form of collective autobiography that reflects the experiences of teaching, learning, and research as a dynamic and tightly interwoven process.

By using non-conventional forms of representation and analysis, in research that works with and within marginalized communities, the researcher, research participant, and the reader collectively struggle to understand their own (autobiographical) experiences through a deep and active engagement with the Other. Through this engagement a relational inquiry space can emerge that uses symbols, metaphors, and narratives to search for new understandings (McIntyre & Cole, 2001). This relational inquiry is often more effectively textually (re)presented by presenting traditional forms of data in an alternative format that can more successfully and evocatively portray the deep personal, political, and pedagogical connections that exist between the researcher, research participants, and the reader.

Through this relational inquiry space a "resonance may be experienced when the personal and professional combine" (McIntyre & Cole, 2001, p. 21). The personal relationship that I developed with each of the research participants greatly contributed to the theoretical analysis and textual presentation of the research as much as the research would potentially contribute to the research participant's study and reflection of themselves. The emergence of the research participant's sense and experience of reflective self-study was an unexpected product of this research inquiry. As McIntyre and Cole (2001) suggest "risk-taking and trust are integral to both self-study and artful research" (p. 22). In arts-based research the goal of the project is often the very relationship itself. This arts-based relational inquiry space that we developed was premised on the qualities of mutual respect, trust, collaboration, and an ethic of care. If any of these qualities had been absent our inquiry space would have been severely limited, and the quality, reliability, and validity of the research would have been in doubt.

McIntyre and Cole (2001) describe the value of this reflective form of relational inquiry as "a reframing or learning experience [that] can be realized best through the involvement of an *important other* whose perspective and somewhat distanced location from the study enhances the understanding acquired" (p. 23, emphasis added). By using found poetry, visual narratives, and collages as research tools, I challenged my research participants to take a step back from their experiences and reflect on them using a new lens. The research participants had the opportunity to become the image and meaning makers of their

own stories. Through our relational inquiry space they were able to reflect on their formal and non-formal educational experiences in a safe and comfortable setting. In this setting many of the research participants were able to reclaim and reframe their experiences in a new and more objective light. For the first time in many of the research participants' lives, they were the ones telling their Queer stories, and I was the enthusiastic audience.

Found poetry as an instructional method

Dewey (1916) described one of the values of a democratic education as helping students to see outside their own experiences. In an effort to experience and formulate new understandings Dewey emphasized that students need to participate in experiences "as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got in such form that the other can appreciate its meaning, and this happens through acts of imagination" (p. 6). Freire (1998) echoes these comments when he describes the critical importance of educators in helping students to name and read the word and the world around them. Educators can use found poetry as an effective instructional strategy that can help students to build the critical literacy skills that Dewey and Freire describe.

Found poetry represents multiple ways of knowing and being that are often expressed emotionally, erotically, and intellectually. Found poetry is not a passive research or teaching strategy, but rather, it is designed to deliberately engage the imagination and produce perspective building as it works to share and uncover different identities and realities. When students engage or create found

poems they are required to use higher cognitive thinking skills that challenge them to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the contexts, dispositions, and beliefs that are present within the narratives, the author, and the reader.

The found poems in this research text serve to release the imagination and recall specific experiences or incidents in the lives of the reader and research participants. Dewey (1934) identified this aesthetic as the "art of experience" (p. 272). By reflecting back on our past we may learn to view our experiences in a new way. Through this reflective lens our experiences come to represent one potential life that exists among many possibilities. Within each of these possibilities exists potential openings for us to examine and create new directions for our lives. The research participants have given us glimpses into their lives so that we can revisit our own as we attend closely to their stories with our own thoughts, feelings, and reflections. In this deep reflection Jordana's scars can become our own, Alex's dreams may represent our sense of hope for the future, Jamie's search for a sense of belonging and understanding may mirror our own search for place and space in the world, and Kevin's personal struggle to come to terms with his identity might represent many of our own desires for the stable and representational.

As Greene (1995) suggests

> the writer and the reader both are responsible for the universe brought into being through the act of reading.... Both are breaking with the mundane, with fixity; they are futuring, choosing them in the face of possibility.... [these narratives] become a kind of gift... [with] the capacity to move beyond what is, to create identity in the light of what might be (p. 77).

The reader is invited to share in this narrative journey and "rewrite the text of what she or he reads in the texts of her or his life" (p. 77).

This act of rewriting is a kind of search for resonance and imagery that evokes our own sense of vulnerability and humanity. These found poems serve to break silences, restore visibility, and challenge dehumanizing stereotypes in the lives of Queer people. Our perspectives are always situational and provisional. No story or narrative is every complete. Different perspectives provide us with new ways of seeing and interpreting the word and the world (Freire, 1998).

Found poetry has value as a critical and creative instructional strategy that can assist students in creating a cognitive map that involves questioning taken for granted perspectives and exploring the unknown, and perhaps for a brief moment, a student will take up and engage a perspective that is different from his or her own. Critical educators can use found poetry to help learners move beyond their own worlds and into the lived realities of others as they explore how individual identities and experiences are always connected to history, culture, and larger political and social forces.

In a postfoundational world our educational curricula and instructional approaches need to expand, deepen, and become more complex. No longer can we continue to rely on educational traditions and canonical knowledges that position certain forms of intelligence and identity as superior. As critical educators we ought to take up and have our students explore new knowledges, subject positions, and modes of expression that can help to develop broad based cultural literacies that call into question and critique dominant Western white

ways of knowing and being. Found poetry is one example of a critical instructional teaching and research strategy that can be used to open texts, stories, and learning to interpretation while engaging a student's imagination and sense of the possible. As critical educators our teaching needs to come alive, relevant, and self-reflective if we are to truly question what democratic education and democratic citizenship means (and ought to mean) in these uncertain postmodern times (Green, 1995).

III. Visual narratives, visual learning: Pictures are worth more than a thousand words

> *"Photographers are poets in the language of symbols.... We crystallize experience, reflect the essence of a moment, convey raw and honest emotion with contrast instead of cadence, composition instead of rhyme, and light and shadow instead of words"* (Phillips, 2000, p. 142).

Photographs and visual imagery can be used to create a non-verbal form of narrative inquiry into our lives and experiences. For many photographers images often represent the thoughts that they cannot express or speak in words. Photographic images represent metaphors for our lives as an image or symbol can push us forward in an attempt to help us understand our complex thoughts and feelings. As Phillips (2000) suggests, photography "is as much about seeing inside ourselves as it is about looking out at the world" (p. 13). Photographs record much more than a catalogue or collection of items. Photography is about relationship and reflective inquiry. Each of the visual narratives in this dissertation has a story to tell, secret to share, and a memory to bring forward (Weiser, 1999).

The visual narratives created by the research participants in this project add layers, depth, and complexity to this research investigation as the viewer is required to make his or her own interpretations about the formal and non-formal educational experiences of Queer young adults in Alberta schools and communities. By including photographs in this dissertation I am providing readers with yet another way to find a connection or entrance point into our research conversation. My inclusion of the research participant's visual narratives and collages is intended to evoke a deeper level of engagement between the reader, writer, and the research participants.

The meanings found by looking at these visual narratives reside in each viewer. As a viewer of photographs and images, or as a reader of the text we make conscious and often unconscious choices about what we attend to. As we engage each image we decode and deconstruct the pictures and text as we search for meaning and resonance from our own thoughts and experiences. This encoding and decoding process becomes a metaphoric experience in which each of us attempts to make meaning of what we have just viewed and read. As Weiser (1999) suggests "it is always the photograph inside the mind that is being worked anyway, even when there is a 'real' image in the hand" (p. 82).

Writing like photography always mediates what can be seen or understood. The knowledge contained within this text is partial, incomplete, and in the process of constantly being recreated and interpreted by each reader and viewer. Writing and photography are reflective mediums that suggest information to the reader/viewer about the person who authored the words or snapped the

picture. The "self" always appears in the writing and photographic process (Weiser, 1999). Taking a photograph, composing a collage, or constructing a story can represent one powerful way to give shape, texture, and coherence to a person's experience as they attempt to make sense of their lives. Using visual techniques in research is more than just creating snapshots; it is also about "the planning, posing, snapping, viewing, keeping, giving, associating, treasuring, and imagining that go along with it that provide such freedom to express, explore, and experience" our inner feelings, experiences, thoughts, and emotions (Weiser, 1999, p. 345).

Photography as an instructional method

As critical adult educators, who are also frontline cultural workers, we can use photography as an instructional technique to assist students in questioning dominant forms of knowledge and regulatory regimes of representation. This critical questioning is an attempt to assist students in actively recovering and reclaiming their culture and identity from the hegemonic strictures and the bureaucratic structures of the educational system. By using photography and visual analysis as a consciousness-raising technique, students can be assisted in developing a critical practice of looking that questions popular visual images and media representations that have been constructed as universal Truths. These universal Truths or ideal readings serve to produce a particular kind of citizen that is often constructed through conscious and unconscious language and images to look or stare at certain object, bodies, and images with a socially constructed and mediated desire.

All visual narratives and imagery are constructed through historical, cultural, political, and social discourses. By examining individual images and the stories that they contain students can begin to question and deconstruct how certain identities, knowledges, and desires are given preference in the media and dominant visual culture. Conversely, students can also be empowered by critical educators to create counter visual narratives by creating their own symbols or photographs that challenge dominant representations. For example, the photos and collages in this research project represent one example of how a research participant or student can deconstruct dominant and normalizing media and cultural images and discourses in an attempt to find and reframe their own identities and histories.

By sharing these counter visual narratives students can empower themselves and each other as they discuss the themes and images that they have created with their classmates. This dialogic encounter is in keeping with Freirean perspectives that encourage students to actively question the word and the world around them. Using multi-perspective lenses students could also analyze their photographic constructions to investigate how the dominant culture-power nexus serves to depict, and many cases objectify women, people of colour, people with disabilities, and sexual minorities. Students could then work to create new visual representations to present images that reflect the principles of inclusion, democracy, social justice, and freedom for oppressed individuals or groups. As Gallo (2001) suggests

> learner generated photography can result in critical reflection and action, raising awareness, and implementing policy changes by looking at issues

> in political and social ways rather than merely individual contexts. By encouraging oppressed groups to represent themselves with images and words instead of accepting the representations thrust upon them by the dominant culture, educators can provide opportunities for greater understanding and transformative changes in and outside of [the classroom and] the workplace (p. 128).

IV. Concluding perspectives

Fine's (1988) influential study on sex education in American schools identified many of the major themes that pertain to current discussions of sex-and-gender differences in education. The major regulating discourses that Fine identified were (1) "sexuality as violence", (2) "sexuality as victimization", (3) "sexuality as individual morality", and (4) "a missing discourse of desire" (Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2001, p. 139). In her study Fine (1998) suggested that educational institutions "typically provide little opportunity for discussions beyond those constructed around superficial notions of male heterosexuality" (p. 36). Fine identified low-income female students and gay and bisexual male students as those at most risk for victimization in schools. In her findings Fine suggested that "the absence of a discourse of desire, combined with the lack of analysis of the language of victimization, may actually retard the development of sexual subjectivity and responsibility in students" (p. 49).

Fine's research is noteworthy as it revealed a host of critical issues that were later explored and built upon throughout much of the Queer educational research that would occur over the next decade. Fine lead the call for researchers to investigate and listen to the voices of young people who had traditionally been silenced and marginalized in educational institutions and discourse. This challenge stimulated the field of Queer youth research and helped to shift the

focus from a victimology to what Friend (1998) has called a resiliency approach. Friend describes the new wave of Queer young adults as "resilient and empowered youth who actively resist oppression, who are organized socially and politically to combat homophobia, and who are taking a place of leadership in their communities" (p. 151-152).

More research is needed to explore and describe the emerging trend of Queer youth activism in Canada. Many Queer young adults are on the frontline and cutting edge of the social justice and human rights work occurring in Canadian schools and communities. How will educators respond as a Queer young adults come out and act-up at younger ages? How will educators be enabled and supported to respond to the challenges of diversity in Canada's increasingly multicultural and pluralistic classrooms? As Canadian teenager Marc Hall has shown, more and more Queer young adults are willing not only to stand up for their basic educational, human, and civil rights, they are also prepared to challenge schools in the courts in an effort to hold them accountable to the fundamental rights and privileges that the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* affords them.

In 2002, as a nation of proud Canadians, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Over these two decades the *Charter* has become instrumental in helping Canadians to understand and define what it means to become a nation of responsible citizens who appreciate, respect, and value diversity, cultural difference, social justice, and

human rights for all citizens. Our *Charter* represents the living fabric of diversity that blankets our multicultural and pluralistic classrooms and communities.

When Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau sought to patriate the Canadian Constitution in 1982, he described the importance of creating a Just Society. He envisioned this Just Society as inclusive and multicultural, fully recognizing, respecting, and honouring the individual, cultural, and linguistic uniqueness of all Canadians. The design and determination for this vision would ultimately be developed through the guidance provided by legislation and key legal decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada. Influential decisions regarding LGBT matters have challenged Canadian educators to rethink traditional social, cultural, and political beliefs that have often erased or excluded Queer persons from the rights and privileges of full citizenship. These decisions have encouraged many educators to recognize and value diversity, and to move beyond the fear of diversity and its challenges in light of Section 15 of the *Charter* and its calls for equity and inclusion.

Unfortunately only sparse resources exist to help adult educators and policy makers address sex-and-gender educational and cultural issues. These issues are significant to many Canadians and, as such, educators and policy makers need to provide the leadership, policy direction, and professional guidance necessary to help create and foster safe, caring, and inclusive working and learning environments for *all* students and *all* teachers sex-and-gender differences. As the narratives of Kevin, Jordana, Alex, and Jamie highlight, significant work remains to live out the dream of Prime Minister Trudeau's

inclusive and Just Society where the dignity, respect, and integrity of all Canadians is recognized, respected, and honoured in our schools, families, and communities.

As Greene (1995) suggests, perhaps we need to develop and encourage a renewed sense of hope and imagination in our schools and teaching. We need this imagination to visualize and believe in different ways of living out the radical and the sexual in our classrooms and communities. This imagination represents a dangerous knowledge that calls into question (hetero)sexualizing myths and stereotypes that serve to maintain the status quo and, in turn, an uncivil society for Queer persons. This dangerous knowledge of imagination requires the presence of different forms of research, teaching, and learning that develop counter narratives to the dominant regimes of truth and power that permeate our classrooms and culture.

In order to build communities of difference, dialogue, and support for sex-and-gender differences, we must live in a dream world that does not yet exist. We gaze with one eye towards the future and another firmly fixed on the past. We dream of the unintelligible future and question what it is like to believe in full equality, social justice, and human rights for all citizens. In today's world we still need our imagination to live fully in the everyday without fear of censure, silence, and death. In our imagination and teaching will we find the hope and strength to believe that all bodies matter? As critical adult educators we can help to make this future a reality by assisting our students and colleagues to understand difference

differently and, in turn, to embrace and affirm the spectrum of sex-and-gender identities.

Intertext VI – Where is the Hope?

In the following narrative vignette, I come to question who has voice, and who is silenced in our schools and classrooms. My narrative speaks to my experience as a closeted Queer teacher attempting to negotiate my way through the heteronormative landscape of schools. Yet, at the same time the reader can also live through my **story and experience as a Queer youth (presented in bold font).** My Queer student and teacher stories are intertwined and nested together amongst memories of silence, isolation, anger, and pain as I look for a glimpse of hope and a way *out* of the classroom closet. Throughout these multiple journeys, I find myself returning to the same question: *Where is the hope?*

Where is the Hope?

I sit **alone** **at an empty desk**.
The students are gone for the day,
yet **I am haunted by a**

lingering voice.

As **I close my eyes**,
Rob's face looks into mine.
I see a reflection of myself.

Rob is a bright, articulate young man,
but like so many others, he has
a secret

he can never share.

He is Gay.

I hear the words

echoing

down empty hallways…

"fag, queer, freak".

Were these the words Rob heard?

***I see the images** on the school walls, in books, and in angry faces.*

***I hear** the **whispered voices** in staff rooms, classrooms, and hallways.*

The voices never come out and say we don't belong here,

*but it is all too clear that **we are** **different**,*

we can NEVER be one of them,

we can NEVER be accepted.

Where do we belong?

*Surely, it can't be in a place as **bad** as they say?*

I don't know any more...

*the **secrets**, the **lies**...*

***who knows** what to believe?*

*Where is the **hope**?*

As I leave for the day,

another day in hiding,

the classroom **door slams shut** behind me,

and I hear Rob's voice echo:

"**Where were you** when **I needed you** most?"

This is the voice I have to live with as I walk through the halls and classrooms

in silence.

This is the voice that **I hear** as I stare at Rob's empty desk.

This is the voice that ***SCREAMS*** **in my mind as they close the** lid on his

casket.

*How many more **voices** will* **follow me**?

How many more will be **lost**?

Another day **in hiding**…

Where is the hope?

Writing and sharing the narrative, "Where is the Hope?" (Wells, 2001/2003) takes me back to my own experiences as a young gay student struggling to find a space and place in a heteronormative school environment. I was a student in the same school system as Rob, and ten years later the same environment of institutional silence continues to exist. This silence is perpetuated by the lack of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender role models, the absence of Queer images in the curriculum, and the homophobic and heterosexist language and behavior that remains unchallenged in school environments.

The silence within the school system ultimately led Rob to take his own life. I, too, felt silenced as a student and again as a teacher. I could never be the teacher I wanted to be, I could never be my self. Instead, I had to spend my teaching career passing as someone else, until finally the cost became too great, the personal toll too high, and I left teaching to never look back on those whispered words and painful faces.

Is there hope? Can we make a difference? Can we imagine schools and communities as inclusive places where *every* student and *every* teacher matter? I believe that by sharing our stories we create hope. Narrative can provide those people who have been silenced with a voice. These voices are ones noticeably absent from our

classrooms, research, and teaching. When will we begin to listen to them? When will they finally be heard?

Every time I read this poem, I relive the pain, hurt, rage, and anger inside me. Every time I read this poem, I think of Rob, and I hope that one day, just maybe, educators will listen to his story and begin to think about the stories within their own schools and ask: Whose voices are heard? Whose voices are silenced? There are stories in each school waiting to be told…

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Guiding Questions for Conversation

1. What is your age and ethnic background?

2. How do you describe yourself as a sexual person (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender)?

3. What does it mean to you to be a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person in your home? School? Community?

4. Can you be "out" in your school environment? Why or why not? Do you want to be "out"? What would be the risks in being "out"? What would be the benefits?

5. How has your family responded to your sexual identity? What has been the biggest challenge or barrier in your family's acceptance of your sexual identity?

6. In what spaces do you feel safe as an LGBT person? In what spaces do you feel threatened as a LGBT person? Why do you feel safe or unsafe in these spaces?

7. Have you ever experienced any physical, verbal, or emotional violence or harassment because of your sexual identity? If yes, what type of violence or harassment did you experience? Where did this violence or harassment occur? Did you seek any help or support? Why or why not?

8. What role has your ethnicity played in the development of your sexual identity? Has it made it more or less difficult to be a part of the larger LGBT community? How has your ethnicity impacted your family's ability to accept and support your sexual identity?

9. Where did/do you learn about being an LGBT person? How do you feel about being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered? Did you always feel this way? How did you cope with this socially stigmatized identity?

10. What is the best thing about being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered? What is the worst thing?

11. What people or places have positively supported you in your sexual identity? How have they supported you?

12. What roles do non-formal community groups (i.e. youth groups, church, bars, Internet) play in your educational process as an LGBT person?

13. When you left high school and went to a post secondary school what expectations did you have as an LGBT person? Did you expect to be more supported? Were you able to be more visible and vocal? Why or why not?

14. Based upon your experiences what would you recommend schools do to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBT young adults?

15. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

Appendix B

Research Participant Consent Form

Attention: _____

[Insert Research Participant's Name]

Re: Participation in a research project entitled ***Understanding Difference Differently: Sex-and-Gender OUTlaws in Alberta Schools***

Principal Investigator:
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You are invited to participate in this research project focused on sex-and-gender differences and educational issues. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived and learned experiences of queer young adults (18 to 25 years old) in formal and non-formal educational environments. This research project will be carried out as stated and there is no deception involved.

This research investigation will explore how many formal educational environments marginalize queer young adults and how these queer young adults may respond by working within non-formal learning communities to create spaces for dialogue and action planning around queer issues.

Your participation is important to help expand the capacity to address issues affecting the sex-and-gender differences of queer young adults in formal and non-formal educational settings. To collect data, a multifaceted strategy that utilizes three methods –interviews, photographs, and narrative writing – will be used.

The following research questions serve as a guide to the investigation:

- How does heterosexism and homophobia impact the personal, political, social, and cultural lives of queer young adults in formal and non-formal educational environments?

- In what ways are queer young adults simultaneously included and excluded in their educational, cultural, family, and community contexts?

- What impact does this inclusion/exclusion have on their mental, physical, and emotional well being?

- How are adult, community, family, and public educational spaces sites of structural, symbolic, and actual violence towards queer young adults?

- What do queer young adults do to survive in their school, family, and cultural environments?

- What kinds of changes to policies, practices, and curriculum would queer young adults suggest to create safe, caring, and supportive educational spaces and places for other queer youth?

You are invited to sign the consent form below once you read the following guidelines for participation:

- As a research participant, you will be asked to sign this consent form to participate.

- You will have the right to refrain from answering any particular questions.

- You have the right to remove and/or destroy any photographs and negatives.

- You will have the right to opt out of the research at any time without penalty.

- Processes to provide accuracy of data, security, confidentiality, and anonymity are implemented in the design of the study. A technical recording device will be used to ensure accuracy of data collected from the interviews. Security and confidentiality measures will be implemented, including the back up of data, secure storage of tapes and photographs, and a plan for deleting photographs and negatives, and electronic and taped data.

- Only the researcher and the transcriber, who is required to sign a confidentiality agreement, will have access to interview data.

- Only the researcher will have access to photographs and negatives. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used and some photographs may be obscured to protect the research participant's confidentiality.

- You agree that I can use information (interviews and photographs) in secondary writing beyond the research report, which includes such venues as conference papers, educational presentations/workshops, and journal articles. The same ethical considerations and safeguards regarding anonymity and confidentiality will apply to secondary uses of data.

- You will be able to review research and photographic material as part of a collaborative review process. You will be provided with drafts of analyses for correction, amendment, and editing. Your interpretations, resistances, and challenges will be taken into account in the rewriting and editing processes.

- Because queer young adults often have to hide their queerness in order to maintain their safety, anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained. Thus in signing the consent form you also agree to maintain strict confidentiality and anonymity in regard to your participation in this research project.

- You will be provided with a copy of the research report and your personal photographic contributions generated from this research project.

Consent to Participate in a research project entitled *Understanding Difference Differently: Sex-and-Gender OUTlaws in Alberta Schools*

I give Kristopher Wells permission to use these photos, photo-documents, interviews, transcripts, and narratives in academic/educational (books, journal articles, presentations, ect.) that CAN be viewed by the general public.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw the photographs at any time without penalty. This is possible by contacting the researcher Kristopher Wells.

I understand that I can list any restrictions to the use of individual photographs.

Restrictions (if any):

_____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Parental Consent Form

Attention: _____

[Insert Research Participant's Name]

Re: Your son's participation in a research project entitled ***Understanding Difference Differently: Sex-and-Gender OUTlaws in Alberta Schools***

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Your son is invited to participate in this research project focused on sex-and-gender differences and educational issues. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived and learned experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) young adults in formal and non-formal educational environments. This research project will be carried out as stated and there is no deception involved.

This research investigation will explore how many formal educational environments marginalize LGBT young adults and how these LGBT young adults may respond by working within non-formal learning communities to create spaces for dialogue and action planning around LGBT issues.

Your son's participation is important to help expand the capacity to address issues affecting the sex-and-gender differences of LGBT young adults in formal and non-formal educational settings. To collect data, a multifaceted strategy that utilizes three methods –interviews, photographs, and narrative writing – will be used.

The following research questions serve as a guide to the investigation:

- How does heterosexism and homophobia impact the personal, political, social, and cultural lives of LGBT young adults in formal and non-formal educational environments?

- In what ways are LGBT young adults simultaneously included and excluded in their educational, cultural, family, and community contexts?

- What impact does this inclusion/exclusion have on their mental, physical, and emotional well being?

- How are adult, community, family, and public educational spaces sites of structural, symbolic, and actual violence towards LGBT young adults?

- What do LGBT young adults do to survive in their school, family, and cultural environments?

- What kinds of changes to policies, practices, and curriculum would LGBT young adults suggest to create safe, caring, and supportive educational spaces and places for other LGBT youth?

You and your son are invited to sign the consent form below once you have read the following guidelines for participation:

- As legal guardian you will be asked to sign this consent form in order for your son to participate in this research project.

- Your son will have the right to refrain from answering any particular questions.

- Your son has the right to remove and/or destroy any photographs and negatives.

- Your son will have the right to opt out of the research at any time without penalty.

- Processes to provide accuracy of data, security, confidentiality, and anonymity are implemented in the design of the study. A technical recording device will be used to ensure accuracy of data collected from the interviews. Security and confidentiality measures will be implemented, including the back up of data, secure storage of tapes and photographs, and a plan for deleting photographs and negatives, and electronic and taped data.

- Only the researcher and the transcriber, who is required to sign a confidentiality agreement, will have access to interview data. Only the

researcher will have access to photographs and negatives. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used and some photographs may be obscured to protect the research participant's confidentiality.

- You and your son agree that I can use information from your son's interviews and photographs in secondary writing beyond the research report, which includes such venues as conference papers, educational presentations/workshops, and journal articles. The same ethical considerations and safeguards regarding anonymity and confidentiality will apply to secondary uses of data.

- Your son will be able to review research and photographic material as part of a collaborative review process. Your son will be provided with drafts of analyses for correction, amendment, and editing. Your son's interpretations, resistances, and challenges will be taken into account in the rewriting and editing processes.

- Because LGBT young adults often have to hide their sexuality in order to maintain their safety, anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained. Thus in signing the consent form you and your son also agree to maintain strict confidentiality and anonymity in regard to your son's participation in this research project.

- Your son will be provided with a copy of the research report and photographs that he created upon the completion of this research project.

Parental Consent to Participate in a research project entitled *Understanding Difference Differently: Sex-and-Gender OUTlaws in Alberta Schools*

I give Kristopher Wells permission to use these photos, photo-documents, interviews, transcripts, and narratives in academic/educational (books, journal articles, presentations, ect.) that CAN be viewed by the general public.

I understand that my son has the right to withdraw the photographs at any time without penalty. This is possible by contacting the researcher Kristopher Wells.

I understand that my son can list any restrictions for the use of individual photographs.

Restrictions (if any):

_____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Understanding Difference Differently: Sex-and-Gender OUTlaws in Alberta Schools

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Photograph Project Guidelines

Thank you for agreeing to take part in Phase II of this research project. In this phase you will be asked to take photographs of various, images, places, symbols, or things that represent your experiences as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered young adult.

Because lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people often have to hide their queerness in order to maintain their safety, anonymity, and confidentiality, please make sure that you **do not** take pictures in which you or other people can be identified.

I've provided you with a disposable camera. Once you have taken all the pictures please contact me (Kris Wells 458-0596 or kwells@ualberta.ca) and I will arrange to pick up the camera and have the film developed. Once the film is processed we will arrange a convenient time for us to sit down and talk about the pictures that you have taken. You will get to keep a copy of all the pictures that you take, and you will also have the right to remove or destroy any pictures that you want.

Here are some suggestions to help get you started with this project (remember that these are only starting points, you might choose to expand or come up with some of your own ideas):

- Photograph what it means to be a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered young adult.
- Photograph places where you feel safe as a queer person? Afraid?
- Photograph what makes you happy? Sad? Worried? Hopeful?
- Photograph your dreams, passions, desires.

- Photograph your secrets.
- Photograph something that represents you or an aspect of your personality.
- Photograph a place, or experience when you felt that you had to hide your sexual orientation.
- Photograph a place where you feel supported as a Queer person.
- Photograph a place where you can be yourself.
- Photograph a place where you feel you have to be silent.
- Photograph homophobia.
- Photograph heterosexism (the belief that heterosexuality is the only accepted form of sexuality).
- Photograph your school experiences or memories as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered person.
- Photograph the secret you (the person know one else sees).
- Photograph the way you would like your life to be.
- Take a photograph that you would put in a time capsule.
- Photograph your "Queer" self.
- Take a photograph of something that you cannot say in words.
- Photograph a place or image of how you learned what it meant to be Queer.

Remember, don't be afraid to play with the camera and have fun!

Appendix E

Photographic Deconstruction Questions

Photography

- How do you view Photography?
- Did you take photographs instinctively or did you have a plan?
- What did you think about having to take photographs of your experiences? Was it easy or difficult?
- Reflecting on the pictures that you took, what struck you most about them?
- What did you learn from the photos?
- What are you going to do with the photos?
- How do you feel about other people seeing your photographs?
- What would you want people to know or understand about you from your photographs?
- What would people learn about LGBT youth from your photographs?

Individual Pictures

- What reactions were you trying to invoke in this photograph?
- What would the title of this photograph be?
- If this photo could speak what would it say? (Write it on the back of the photograph)
- What is missing from this photo?
- What are the secrets in this photo?
- What would other people learn about you by looking at this photograph?
- What would you ask this photo, if you could? What would this photo ask you?
- If I could give this photo to someone who would it be? Why would you want to give it to them?
- Who should definitely not get this photo? What might they say if they did happen to see it?
- Describe the picture(s) you didn't take – use a blank photograph to stimulate discussion

The Collection of Photographs

- Are there any images that you avoided taking? Why?
- What pictures would you show your parents? Teachers? Why?
- If you had to pick 1 or 2 photographs that best represented you, which ones would you pick? What do these photos say about you? What are they trying to tell other people?
- Which photographs best represent your educational experiences as an LGBT youth?
- Do you notice any themes or patterns emerging from this collection of photographs?